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**On the inside looking in: The dynamics and experiences of internally hired  
principals of Iowa public school districts**

by

John Chalstrom

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education, (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:  
Larry Ebbers, Major Professor  
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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2007

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Problem .....	2
Purpose.....	6
Research Questions .....	8
Significance of Study .....	8
Theoretical Perspectives .....	9
Place-Bound Theory .....	9
Institutional Ethnography.....	11
Convergence of Place-Bound Theory and Institutional Ethnography .....	13
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
Background of Internal Hiring, Promotion, and Succession .....	14
Place-Bound Administrators .....	24
Institutional Ethnography.....	29
Application and Construction of Institutional Ethnography .....	33
Summary .....	35
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	36
Methodological Approach .....	38
Participants.....	38
Data Collection .....	40
Interviews.....	40
Coding .....	41
Triangulation.....	43
Conclusion .....	44
CHAPTER 4: ON THE INSIDE LOOKING IN: THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNALLY HIRED PRINCIPALS .....	46
The Experiences of Internally Hired Principals.....	48
Reason for Seeking Internal Promotion.....	48
Changing Relationships .....	57
Knowing Too Much.....	65
Perception of Central Administration .....	68
Reasons for Staying in the District .....	71
Salary and Benefit Issues .....	73
Principals' Reflections on Being Internally Promoted .....	76
Commitment to the Organization.....	80
Summary of Themes .....	83
Geographic Constraints.....	83

Commitment to the District .....	84
Pragmatic Use of Internal Promotion .....	84
Relationships .....	85
Central Administration.....	86
Institutional Inbreeding .....	87
Commitment .....	88
Conclusion .....	88
CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	89
Place-Bound Theory and Internal Promotion .....	90
Economics of Succession Planning .....	94
Summary of Themes .....	99
Internal Hiring and Institutional Ethnography .....	100
Family Structure, Organization.....	101
The Functional Complex.....	103
Implications of Internal Hiring in Practice .....	105
Place-Bound Limitations .....	105
Economic Savings.....	105
Institutional Ethnography and the Implementation of Internal Hiring Practices .....	106
External Hiring Considerations.....	107
Recommendations.....	107
Support System for Internally Hired Principals.....	108
Organizational Commitment and Identification of Potential Administrators.....	109
Transitional Planning and Mission .....	111
Continued Professional Development Opportunities.....	112
Financial Benefits and Issues.....	113
The Role of Local School Boards .....	113
Place-Bound Status and Relocation Costs .....	114
Reflection .....	115
Conclusion .....	117
REFERENCES .....	119

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## ABSTRACT

Educational administrative positions are often given to individuals who are hired from outside of a public school district. These individuals are hired for their experience, leadership qualities, and particular expertise. However, it may serve districts well to look internally in their own ranks and promote those persons who possess the necessary leadership skills and dedication needed to administer a school. This qualitative study will examine the merits of internal promotion and succession planning as it pertains to school administration at the building level through the theoretical constructs of place-bound theory and institutional ethnography.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*“It is like trying to see the forest through the trees.”*

The above statement was made by an elementary principal to summarize his/her experiences as an internally promoted administrator. It speaks to the complexities of a seemingly simple transition. Yet the ascendancy to the administrative ranks from the classroom in the same school district is a complex journey in which perceptions, relationships, and responsibilities change in profound ways. This study seeks to understand the dynamics of an individual's changing role within a school district due to professional advancement. It will focus on the challenges facing individuals who have been long-time instructors within a school district and then assumed administrative responsibilities within the same district. The primary purpose for this study is to ascertain the dynamics of change within an organization and whether the advancement of currently employed teachers to administrative positions influences these institutional forces. Emphasis will be placed on what forces act upon internally hired principals in such a manner as to influence their perceptions and professional lives. These factors may influence district hiring policies as it seeks internal rather than external candidates for administrative positions.

By examining the experiences of individuals who have obtained their positions through internal promotion the dynamics that result in successful leadership experiences can be analyzed. These data can be used to construct successful hiring policies that seek to cultivate leadership internally. Utilizing the strengths of individuals within an organization to optimize the efficiency of transitional periods in the administration of a

public school may be a prudent approach for succession planning. Emphasis will be placed on determining what larger social forces act on individuals during the course of their daily lives that help shape and order their professional careers.

### Problem

Public school districts across the United States are beginning to experience a shortage of public school administrators. It is anticipated that this shortage will only increase in the coming years (McAdams, 1998). Although projections consistently forecast a shortage of administrators across the country and within the state of Iowa, there is an ample number of teaching practitioners that are certified as administrators (Iowa Department of Education, 2006). However, many of these individuals are unwilling to seek administrative positions for various reasons. Research indicates that the stress, hours, extended contract, and supervision of activities may hinder teachers who are certified administrators from seeking such positions. The salary differential is simply not enough to entice these individuals to the administrative ranks (Murphy & Beck, 1994). Given the prospect of a looming administrative shortage and the reality that there is in fact an ample number of certified administrators that could fill these positions but choose not to, it may be prudent to examine the experiences of teachers who have been promoted internally to administrative positions. By analysis of these experiences inferences may be drawn as to the challenges, problems, and rewards that exist for those who qualify for advancement but choose not to.

Compounding the issue of internal promotion is the existence of very little data or follow up regarding the impact that internal promotion has on the individual advanced to an administrative role. The 2006 hiring process of the superintendent of schools in the

Des Moines Community School District (CSD) provides anecdotal evidence as to how little is known about the dynamics of internal promotion and how emotional the issue can become in the eyes of the public. The Chicago search firm of Attea Associates, hired by the Des Moines CSD School Board to identify potential candidates, stated that internal candidates needed to receive the same treatment as any other candidate for the position. However, parents argued otherwise. Citing that internal candidates have deep roots in the community and therefore are more committed to the education of children, several parents came forward to encourage the Des Moines board to closely examine the elevation of internal candidates to the top post in the district. Furthermore, questions were raised regarding the hiring of a search firm for \$35,000 to hire a superintendent when potential candidates existed within the district. Attea Associates representatives admitted that if the Des Moines district was settled on hiring internally, it would be a waste of financial resources to secure their services (Campbell, 2006). Pressures may certainly exist when hiring a consultant to hire externally rather than rationalize to the public why such an expense was incurred when the recommended candidate was hired internally. Therefore, securing search consultants may well be a mechanism for discouraging internal applicants and send a message that external candidates are preferred.

The Des Moines CSD superintendent hiring process is an example that very little is actually known about the experiences and dynamics of internal hiring. My earlier attempt at examining the issue of internal promotion provided valuable insight into the ambiguity of the issue. The research originally intended to provide a quantitative element by examining the perceived effectiveness of internally promoted candidates as compared to their externally hired cohorts. In order to determine this, the superintendent of each

cooperating school district was asked to complete a survey regarding the perceived efficacy of each building level principal in the district. The survey utilized was created by Keith Leithwood (2001) and can be found in his book, *Making Schools Smarter*. The survey titled “School Policies and Procedures” utilizes a 4-point Likert-type scale. The superintendent was asked to identify the individuals being surveyed as being either internally or externally hired principals.

The survey consisted of eight categories: Coherence, Student Orientation, Student Awareness, Special Needs, Student Services Strategies, Professional Focus, Staff Development, and Resource Allocation. Each category consisted of a series of questions asking the superintendent who completed the survey to assess the building principal in these respective areas. An average categorical score was computed for each individual evaluation. The surveys were disaggregated on the basis of internal versus external hiring. Again, a categorical mean was computed for all surveys according to hiring status. An independent  $t$  test was administered in order to determine whether or not a level of significance existed which may indicate whether or not internally promoted candidates are perceived by their respective superintendents as having greater skills as a building level leader. A nice clear-cut instrument was developed that would certainly unveil significant data yielding earth shattering results regarding internally hired school administrators. I was quite proud of my methodological approach and was certain that the results would be concise and tidy. How wrong I was in developing this presupposition.

No significantly meaningful data resulted from this survey of superintendents because such a low statistical power existed in the sample that no true level of significance could be determined. One superintendent surveyed refused to differentiate

the responses on the survey between any of the principals in the district, whether they were hired internally or externally. This resulted in each principal receiving the same mean and, therefore, no valid comparison could be made. Another superintendent indicated in writing that he/she was quite uncomfortable comparing their principals and evaluating their strengths against each other.

What did result from this original attempt was the belief that a qualitative study was the best way of examining the dynamics of internally hired building principals. By examining and analyzing the words and reflections of those who had experienced internal promotion, the ambiguities could perhaps be clarified or, at the very least, meaningful insight created. In order to fully comprehend the intricacies of internal hiring it must be understood from the beginning that social organization is exceedingly complex and dynamic. In the realm of qualitative research, institutional ethnographers assert that the only way in which individuals can survive in an organization is to accept the social dynamics of everyday life (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). Social life is not a chaotic exercise of disconnected events but, rather, is a highly organized construct in which individuals are able to assign meaning to their existence through the daily activities in which they are participants. It is the participation of individuals in the everyday normalcy of social interaction that institutional ethnography seeks to explore. Through the examination of daily experience, institutional ethnographers seek to determine which forces act in such a manner to shape the behavior of individuals. By applying the approach of institutional ethnographers to the study of internally promoted building principals, the larger social forces that act on individuals can be identified and provide

greater insight toward the merits of internal promotion as a viable hiring strategy within public school organizations.

What is known regarding internal hiring is that when such a decision is made an individual's role changes within the system. This study will seek to examine how these changes impact the individual and, more importantly, what institutional forces operate on the individual during this transition from the classroom to the office. By analyzing the narratives of those who have experienced internal promotion a greater insight into the impact of such a hiring decision can be ascertained. Furthermore, whether discussing internal or external hiring, organizations rarely collect data from an employee regarding his/her own individual experience. Performance evaluations tools tend to be mechanisms driven by upper management for the sake of performance review and do not necessarily seek to examine the experiences of the individual. It is the intent of this study to examine the nature and experiences of internally hired principals and use these data as a useful tool when considering promotion within the system.

### Purpose

Internal promotion is a fairly common practice in private sector organizations. Many organizations have succession plans for administrative promotion in an attempt to provide consistency toward institutional goals and vision. By harnessing the talents of individuals dedicated to an organization and elevating them to managerial endeavors, the core mission of the organization can move forward unabated. However, the relationship between teachers and administrators in a public school is a unique relationship that may not exist in other organizational entities comprising professionals. A division of culture, trust, and acceptance seemingly exists between these two entities. There is also a

pedagogical mindset that separates the two as teachers tend to value autonomy as administrators advocate organizational vision and community, particularly at the secondary level (Gaff, 1997). Therefore, the promotion of a teacher to an administrator is a complex undertaking as relationships evolve and perceptions regarding roles change. It is the examination of this process that must take place in order to measure the efficacy and pragmatism of internal promotion in a public school setting.

Given that public schools will be facing a massive shortage of administrators in the coming years; it would seem that opportunities for advancement are virtually limitless for those who are willing to seek administrative positions. Yet as the evidence suggests, there is in fact an adequate supply of teachers certified as administrators who could fill these positions yet who choose to remain in the classroom. By examining the experiences of internally promoted administrators and analyzing the reasons why these individuals have not sought positions outside of the district in which they teach, insight may be generated into why individuals may be reluctant to pursue career opportunities outside of their district. This information is vital in creating human resource strategies that must be implemented by school districts in the coming years as they face the looming specter of administrative shortages. By understanding the forces that prevent individuals from relocating, school districts can develop hiring, recruitment, and succession mechanisms that will align with these realities in a constructive manner that deals effectively with hiring effective leaders in a time of impending shortage.



### Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What are the experiences of individuals who were promoted internally from the classroom to the position of building principal?
2. What factors prevented internally hired principals from seeking administrative positions in other school districts?

### Significance of Study

This study will examine the unique experience of the internal promotion of a teacher to the building level leadership positions in public schools. An examination of the experiences of principals who were promoted internally can create a thoughtful perspective on the succession planning process. By examining the perceptions of those who have experienced internal promotion, as well as their respective reflections, a framework may be constructed that not only examines the viability of such an option but provides recognition as to the change processes that occur during one's professional evolution from the classroom to the principal's office. The experiences and perceptions of individuals who were promoted will provide a rich and thick description that can be helpful in articulating the processes and safeguards that need to be developed or implemented when individuals in public schools are internally promoted.

This study will provide significant data for future use in the examination of not only factors that result in individuals seeking internal promotions but also what factors are present that prevent certified and competent professionals from seeking administrative positions outside of their respective school districts. This study will examine and analyze the shared experiences of internally hired principals who choose not

to seek positions outside of their district but remain committed to the district in which they taught. These reasons may provide school districts with valuable insights not only into their hiring process but also into the larger forces that shape the hiring dynamics of school leaders in general. There may be factors and obstacles that exist that prevent individuals from seeking positions elsewhere. These factors are imperative in developing a comprehensive understanding of the organizational culture of a school district. By examining the experiences of principals who are promoted from within a system and developing an understanding of these, organizations may develop a more complete understanding of the level of commitment of its employees.

### Theoretical Perspectives

Internal hiring processes will be viewed through two theoretical lenses: place-bound theory and institutional ethnography.

#### *Place-Bound Theory*

An important aspect of this study is to determine the factors or reasons why qualified administrative candidates did not seek to advance their educational careers outside of the district in which they taught. The definitive research in the area of succession planning in public schools was developed by Richard Carlson (1972) who identified two distinct career tracks of school superintendents: *place bound* and *career bound*. Although Carlson's research centered on the superintendency, it is reasonable to assume that the same conditions apply to building principals.

Career-bound administrators are those who put career above place. Those who seek positions in school administration are not bound by strong geographic ties to a particular place and are willing to relocate in order to assume a position that matches

their particular career aspirations. Place-bound administrators assume their position from within a system. Place-bound administrators have sacrificed similarly to career-bound administrators. They have both obtained graduate degrees during the course of their respective teaching careers, the result of a significant emotional and financial investment (Carlson, 1972). However place-bound administrators seek positions from within the district in which he/she is currently employed. Place-bound administrators have a significant history within a school system and are a known quantity. His/her commitment to the organization is well established as are his/her weaknesses. According to Carlson, this commitment to the district by place-bound administrators cannot be diminished, for it provides a powerful emotional foundation not only for the employee but also for the subordinates who were formerly colleagues (Carlson).

Carlson (1972) also developed an important distinction between what he calls *public school employees* and *administrator*. Place-bound administrators come to refer to themselves and be referenced by others as public school employees. Their role in a district began, more than likely, as a classroom teacher although recently it is not unusual for a teacher to have entered a school system as a paraprofessional. Their advancement through a school system results in a variety of roles. By some, they may be referred to as a teacher, by others, an administrator, and by another group, as a mixture of both depending upon the circumstances by which they are scrutinizing the individual. It is important to examine this facet of place-bound administrators. The narratives of those internally promoted reveal an evolving sense of role. However, their role is perhaps never as defined as it would be if they were career-bound administrators (Carlson). They relate to their former teaching peers from their role as both teacher and administrator. Yet, as

they become accustomed to their role as principal, they begin to feel the effects of evolving relationships due to the changing nature of their position. However, as their narratives attest, none of the principals became entirely accustomed to the singular role of administrator and began to assume the blurred identity of public school employee identified by Carlson.

### *Institutional Ethnography*

The foundation of institutional ethnography is rooted in the works of feminist scholar and theorist, Dorothy E. Smith. Smith (1987) developed a research methodology that allows individuals to understand the organization of their own lives as well as the fabric that weaves societal structures together (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). Institutional ethnographers firmly believe that human beings are social animals and that the only way in which individuals can survive is to accept the social dynamics of everyday life (Campbell & Gregor). It is the participation of individuals in the everyday normalcy of social interaction that institutional ethnography seeks to explore. By examining the everyday, institutional ethnographers seek to determine which forces act in such a manner as to shape the behavior of individuals. Knowledge of these forces is useful in developing an understanding of how individuals fit into the larger societal web and how the actions of individuals are oftentimes the result of larger institutional forces as opposed to the actions of an individual (Smith, 1987).

Institutional ethnography differs from the traditional fields of social psychology and sociology. Traditional sociological inquiry oftentimes concentrates on ruling institutions in society and how they in turn influence the actions and behaviors of individuals. Institutional ethnography differs in that the focus of the research centers on

events from everyday life. Incidents and actions that occur during daily life are actually shaped by larger forms of social organization that are not necessarily evident. Therefore, the task of an institutional ethnographer is to discover how these “everyday” events are formed by larger social forces and how the coordination of these activities come together in a cohesive pattern that acts in concert with achieving institutional objectives (Grahame, 1998).

Smith (1987) referred to the examination of everyday life activity as “problematic.” That is, the events of daily life are perplexing and challenging. Yet, however problematic, and in fact enigmatic, these events may be, upon examination daily life and human interaction reveal a sophisticated coordination of activity that is tied to dominant forms of social organization (Smith, 1987). The approach of institutional ethnographers differs from traditional methodologies in social science research by this focus on the experiential activities of individuals in daily life. Traditional social research oftentimes examines the practices of formal ruling organizations and how these forces act upon individuals in society to affect behavior. This approach lies in the positivist tradition and is oftentimes reliant upon quantifiable data to sustain its validity.

The challenge of an institutional ethnographer is to examine not the ruling entities in society but, rather, to begin with the examination of everyday life situations (Smith, 1987). By examining and dissecting the actions and events that occur during what may be considered the ordinary and even mundane, researchers can discover how ruling forces actually operate on individuals and affect social organization (Grahame, 1998). A model is therefore created that challenges a researcher to examine the everyday in an attempt to discover how and what ruling forces act on individuals as opposed to the traditional

sociological method of examining the world through the lenses of these institutional entities (Smith, 1987).

*Convergence of Place-Bound Theory and Institutional Ethnography*

Narrative analysis in this study will be used as a tool to discover the forces that act on individuals who were the beneficiaries of internal promotion. By examining the experiences and perceptions of internally hired principals, greater insight can be generated regarding what larger societal forces act on them. Furthermore, the forces that perhaps have resulted in these individuals being characterized as place-bound administrators will be revealed. Therefore, the societal forces that act upon individuals in their daily lives that have resulted in their place-bound status can perhaps be discovered utilizing institutional ethnography. It is the convergence of these two approaches that will best yield the insights needed to adequately analyze the experiences of internally hired principals. It is only by understanding the experiences of internally hired principals and determining what everyday forces act upon them that the theoretical construct of “place bound” can be synthesized with any ontological construct.

## CHAPTER 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

## Background of Internal Hiring, Promotion, and Succession

Nationwide, a shortage of public school administrators is becoming evident. For a variety of reasons individuals are seemingly less willing to pursue careers in public school administration (Pounder & Young, 1996). This problem is compounded by the fact that there exists no evidence that the nation is lacking in the number of individuals certified in school administration (McAdams, 1998). Individuals simply are not willing to leave the security of the classroom for the arduous role of assuming the responsibilities of being a building level leader (McAdams). Efforts at recruiting school administrators in the past have relied on processes and procedures for screening and evaluating candidates rather than focusing energies on attracting candidates to open positions (Pounder & Young). School districts have relied on mechanisms designed to attract candidates as opposed to developing processes that actively seek competent individuals. Given the entrance into a period in which an apparent shortage of willing candidates seeking positions in public school administration exists, it may be prudent for local education agencies to accelerate their efforts at recruiting competent applicants as opposed to relying on past practices of sifting and sorting through applications that have come to the district (Pounder & Young).

The impending shortage of public school administrators has resulted in the reexamination of recruitment strategies. Newton and Witherspoon (2007) have proposed that districts begin examining the motivating factors that meet the needs of aspiring administrators (Newton & Witherspoon, 2007). Through the examination of the

economic and psychological needs of aspiring administrators as well as job specific tasks, human resource departments can begin to develop strategies that are more effective recruiting strategies than those traditionally relied upon (Newton & Witherspoon, 2007).

In light of the changing dynamics of administrative recruitment and an apparent nationwide shortage of individuals filling administrative positions, there may be advantages to promoting and recruiting individuals within an organization to administrative positions. Prior to making any decisions regarding filling administrative vacancies, districts must make a concerted effort to define and actually locate potential pools of applicants. Again, past practice for many districts has been to simply wait for individuals to apply for vacant positions. Faced with the magnitude of administrative turnover in the coming years and the reality that fewer educators are attracted to such positions, school districts need to become much more aggressive in understanding where their candidate pools lie (Pounder & Young, 1996). Aside from the theoretical aspects of internal promotion and the effects it may have on organizational dynamics, there exist strong pragmatic considerations for adopting such a strategy. Due to the nationwide shortage of public school administrators, it may serve a district to evaluate its own internal pool of candidates to determine whether or not individuals are willing and able to serve in the capacity of building level leaders. By maintaining proper records of employees' various areas of expertise and certification, districts may be able to be in a position to more effectively identify individuals who may be willing to be considered for administrative positions within a district (Winter, Rinehart, & Munoz, 2002).

Perhaps the greatest pool of potential applicants lies within the school district itself. By developing processes by which individuals are identified as having



characteristics desired for administrative positions, school districts can readily develop their own internal pool of candidates, which can be drawn upon when vacancies occur. Internal candidates are known quantities who are familiar with the organizational culture and practices of the local school district and will assimilate in a much quicker manner utilizing fewer district resources in the process. Furthermore, in large districts where affirmative action plans call for increasing diversity within the administrative ranks, internal hiring can be used as an equity tool toward obtaining this end (Pounder & Young, 1996).

Perhaps the key to attracting a candidate to an administrative position, using either external or internal hiring mechanisms, is developing an understanding of what factors are inherent in a position that would make it a palatable change from a classroom assignment. Research by McAdams (1998) into the socio-economic changes that have occurred within the teaching ranks may provide insight into not only why administrative shortages exist but also why adopting internal hiring measures may be a logical strategy for local school districts to adopt. One compelling reason why a shortage of school administrators looms is the increase in two-income families. In the past, school administrators tended to be the primary wage earner in a household resulting in a condition in which they were much more mobile in their profession. When a job vacancy opened, it was easier for a household to pursue a new position given that household income differentials were not significantly upset. However, in an economic reality in which two wage earners exist in the same household, oftentimes with the spouse of an administrator commanding an equal or larger salary, mobility becomes much more restricted than in the past. Household income may be significantly affected if a teacher

seeks an administrative position in another community or a teacher seeks to relocate for the sake of entering school administration (McAdams).

A review of literature provides considerable insight into the culture of employee promotion to managerial positions within an organization. When examining internal hiring mechanisms, in-house considerations need to be examined. It has been demonstrated, for instance, that morale has a tendency to increase in an organization once a known individual is assigned to a leadership position (Rebore, 2004). Seeing as the individual's past job performance skills and evaluations are known and available to the school district, central office administrators, whose task it is to hire building principals, possess a more informed basis for the selection of an internal candidate to such positions (Rebore).

The major issue regarding internal promotion may well be the perception of the new manager/administrator by himself/herself and peers (Josefowitz, 1989). A teacher must be cognizant that a promotion to a managerial position changes the relationships previously established with peers. Relationships that were based on lateral articulation are replaced with those in which vertical authority, and power is held by the manager. Therefore, relationships may change from those of "friend" to that of "boss." Recognition of the changing nature of workplace relationships is vital in order for internal promotion to succeed.

Boulton and Coldron (1998) believe that many individuals resist internal promotion in educational institutions in order to avoid internal rivalries and jealousies among peers. This is particularly evident when the decision to post a position for an internal candidate is made during a time of budgetary crisis. When such decisions are

made, the perceptions of individuals being sought for those positions are conflicted: Are they being sought for who they are or for the economic savings they may bring the institution? Internal promotion will only be successful if peers are supportive of the promotion and the institution places an emphasis on the individual's talents and merits rather than the cost savings incurred by the organization (Boulton & Coldron).

The Institute of Personnel and Development (1998) found that internal promotion cannot be viewed from the simplistic perspective of rivalries emerging from alleged jealousies around the water cooler. Internal promotion can actually increase productivity by creating environments in which employees feel empowered by administrators whom they perceive as having the best interests of the organization at heart. An individual who has been inculcated into the dynamics of the organizational mission and vision will be able to continue that commitment while in a position of managerial authority (Institute of Personnel and Development).

Seeking leadership from within an organization was a key feature of Heifetz & Laurie (1997). When organizations allow senior management to create a vision and align goals accordingly, adaptive change cannot take place because subordinates feel compelled to follow rather than question (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). In order to create a culture in which subordinates will take initiative in solving problems, senior leaders must adopt an approach in which leadership means supporting rather than controlling. By harnessing the leadership potential of those within the organization, more dynamic change can occur (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997).

There exist pragmatic considerations for examining the practice of internal hiring. Waldman (2003) asserted that internal promotion within an organization is desired from

an efficiency standpoint. Organizations that favor internal promotion of management from the lower ranks often do so for two reasons: efficiency and intimate knowledge of the candidate. A time consistency element exists that allows internal candidates to acclimate themselves to their new positions without having to socialize themselves into an entirely new organizational culture. Furthermore, organizations that promote employees to leadership positions have a better concept of the individual's commitment, skills, and talents. When an employee is promoted within the organization and is successful in a new leadership position, not only is transition time diminished, but also a return is made on the organization's investment in the employee's previous experience. This simply does not occur if an organization relies on external promotion practices (Waldman).

It must also be noted that a significant difference exists between the organizational cultures of the business world and public education (Collins, 2005). Business models of executive leadership tend to be highly structured and concentrated around the use of clear executive power. Governmental organizations such as public education are less structured and leaders have less executive authority. Leadership in the public sector is oftentimes dependent on the ability of managers to follow initiatives when subordinates have the freedom not to (Collins).

Public schools tend to be bureaucratic institutions that perpetuate isolation (Gardner, 1991). In order to create dynamic organizations that resist isolation and encourage collegiality between teachers and administrators, effective models of collaboration within educational institutions must be developed that promote such practices. This can be accomplished by promoting instructors to administrative positions

or by creating conduits by which managerial promise is rewarded by elevating the status of teachers to high positions of responsibility (Gaff, 1997).

Other issues may lead an organization to adopt internal hiring practices. Breaugh (1992) stated that it is far easier to evaluate the qualifications of an internal candidate given that his/her performance has been scrutinized by the organization. Furthermore, it is a much more expedient process than seeking external candidates. School districts may in fact opt for internal hiring strategies when a relatively short time frame exists in which to produce a qualified candidate (i.e., late resignation toward the beginning of a school year). Internal hires do not necessarily need to be socialized into organizational dynamics. It is an environment in which operating policies, procedures, norms, and policies are familiar. This translates into less transition time for an employee and allows organizational goals to move forward with little disruption or interruption in the delivery of services.

It is important, however, when considering a pool of internal candidates to address why individuals who are certified as administrators are not always willing to become applicants for vacant positions. Administrative positions in public schools are increasingly being burdened with responsibilities including increased expectations and accountability, mandated state and federal paperwork, supervision of evening and weekend activities, and the rapidly changing instructional environment in which public schools exist (Murphy & Beck, 1994). This may be information that human resource managers need in order to effectively entice internal candidates into available positions as well as to dispel any erroneous information that may exist regarding a particular position (Murphy & Beck).

Barber (1998) said human resource organizations need to examine the characteristics needed in a particular administrative position and begin examining individuals within the teaching ranks who possess these attributes. By defining the desired characteristics and identifying an internal pool of individuals who may possess the abilities to transfer their skills to administrative positions, a school district may develop a cadre of future leaders from within the ranks (Barber).

The identification of future leaders may lead to the adoption of a policy of “succession planning” (Normore, 2004). Succession planning is the implementation of a strategic plan in which leadership traits, expectations, instructional abilities, and managerial competence are measured and training is instituted for potential candidates. Working in collaboration with teacher organizations and associations, districts are able to develop a formal process by which the potential talents of future leaders are cultivated and refined. This may be a beneficial strategy in particularly large districts in order to ensure efficiency and to maintain an adequate pool of successors to retiring building level leaders.

Many teachers who possess the skills to become future administrators in a public school usually have multiple opportunities to display their talents in their respective districts (Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985). By demonstrating their talent to their principal, (assuming of course that the principal has the ability to discern such talent), teachers are afforded a host of opportunities to not only display, but also hone their leadership capabilities. Teachers oftentimes gain recognition for participation on district curriculum committees and by developing reputations as fair-minded but assertive disciplinarians. As their reputation and talents become better known, they are then encouraged by their

principals to seek administrative certification. After obtaining their certification and demonstrating their abilities, oftentimes teachers will gain credibility from central administration and, with the support of their mentor principals, eventually receive the opportunity to lead a building when such a vacancy occurs (Miskel & Cosgrove).

Successful school administration and the capacity for a school to achieve gains in student achievement can only occur in an environment that fosters collegiality and positive relationships among all individuals within an organization. Fullan (2001) has written extensively on the topic of nurturing relationships within an organization in order for substantive gains to occur. In his book, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Fullan developed a model of school leadership that is built upon the concept of developing a shared vision within a school culture based on a fundamental moral purpose. Once the moral purpose is established, it is incumbent upon all those within the organization to develop positive, nurturing relationships that will advance the institutional mission and, ultimately, lead to successful school transformation and improved learning for students.

Fullan (2001) believes that this is only possible if nurturing relationships based on mutual goals, trust, and understanding are created. When this environment is created, it is the basis for knowledge building and the development of effective strategic plans that will ultimately benefit student learning. However, if relationships are diminished or ignored and school administrators place greater emphasis on policy development without taking the time to nurture collegial relationships, organizational efficacy will be diminished (Fullan). In order for successful administrative endeavors to occur, sound relationship building and an environment of trust must be established before any policy initiative or program can be developed and implemented.

The concept of relationship building as the foundation of successful school leadership is also reinforced by Murphy (2002). Murphy set forth a model of “reculturation” of the educational profession by rejecting traditional leaders who have been relegated to managerial responsibilities and instead promotes a model of managers as educational leaders. In an era of school reform, administrators need to develop a persona of educational leaders, not managers. By recasting themselves as lead teachers rather than business managers, school administrators will be given more credence in an era of school improvement and accountability. When examined from the perspective of internal promotion, this model provides a valid personnel strategy by utilizing the educational talents of known and respected teachers in administrative positions. These individuals have developed a credible reputation for instructional and academic excellence within the organization. Their accomplishments, therefore, will transfer to their new role as an administrator. Using this model, a successful teacher who is promoted to an administrative position on the merits of his/her instructional efficacy will be viewed as an educational leader rather than simply being seen as a bureaucrat.

Schools are not like many other organizations. Public schools, by virtue of their existence and insistence on compulsory education, are uniquely moral institutions (Greenfield, 1995). Effective school administrators need to be able to develop the moral endeavor necessary to lead a building and, at the same time, ensure that appropriate instruction and learning is occurring within the school walls. School administrators, therefore, are managers, instructional leaders, and moral stewards of the public school organization (Greenfield). The concept of moral leadership that has emerged in public education administration asserts that values are a central aspect of all leadership and



administrative endeavors. The very notion of leadership centers on the ability of an educational leader to project moral endeavor and provide an ethical base on which all decisions rest. A leader must be viewed by the school organization as one who possesses moral and ethical clarity in order for institutional decisions and mandates to possess validity (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Using the notion of moral leadership, the selection of internal candidates may be prudent given the known quantity the individual possesses in regard to ethical considerations.

There are, however, some cautions that need to be considered when discussing the merits of a policy that promotes internal hiring processes. A potential pitfall of relying on such a strategy could well be institutional inbreeding (Rebore, 2004). A school district may risk evolving into an organization that is resistant to new ideas, particularly those that seek to alter or overturn traditional notions of bureaucratic functioning. By hiring external candidates, an organization is more likely to adopt new ideas and innovations (Breagh, 1992). Furthermore, the hiring of an external candidate can be a powerful message, particularly if credible internal candidates exist, that organizational change will be taking place and the status quo will no longer be acceptable (Breagh).

#### Place-Bound Administrators

The concept of *succession planning* was a relatively popular area of research in the 1960s and 1970s, attributed perhaps to the rapid expansion of American public schools as districts sought to accommodate the needs of a swelling baby boom generation. Schools were being built and local districts were trying to fill teaching and administrative positions in order to meet the needs of this unique generation. Much

research was conducted regarding the most efficient manner to fill administrative positions and what the most preferable approach for district districts to take should be.

Carlson (1972) wrote extensively on succession planning and was the first to elaborate on the concept of career-bound and place-bound school administrators. Carlson wrote primarily on the dynamics pertaining to the superintendency, but his concepts are certainly applicable to any administrative position within a school district. Carlson concluded that there were only two distinct paths toward obtaining an administrative position: by aggressively pursuing such a job and demonstrating the willingness to relocate for such an opportunity or by waiting for such a job to open in the district.

Carlson (1972) posited motivational factors exist that distinguish place-bound from career-bound administrators. The place-bound administrator, according to Carlson, places a higher value on residing in a specific community or simply wishes to continue to reap the benefits of living in a place of long-time residence. There are forces present that act on individuals that do not motivate them to seek employment elsewhere. They would be perfectly content in their present position within the district and if ascending the hierarchical ladder in order to assume a managerial position meant leaving the community, they would decline such an opportunity (Carlson).

Yet Carlson (1972) did not believe that place-bound administrators were any less effective due to what could be considered a lack of motivation for pursuing a position outside of their district of hire. The fact that individuals within an organization are known quantities and have established relationships is a powerful force in organizational effectiveness (Carlson). When examined through the perspectives of Fullan (2001), who has written extensively on the importance of relationships in the efficacy of an

organization, the ability of an internally hired administrator to advance a school's mission due to the fact that established relationships exist may have credence. Carlson also believed that subordinates tend to rally around an organizational leader who is viewed as being "with them" during difficult times and experiences. By having a leader who is home grown, the history shared with subordinates during the social organization and enculturation of the district cannot be diminished (Carlson).

However, place-bound administrators may have characteristics that are potentially damaging or certainly seen as eventual liabilities such as their inability to distance themselves from their previous role or relationships with subordinates. This can certainly hamper organizational innovation and also lead to a propensity to conform to the wishes of subordinates as opposed to charting an independent and ultimately innovative course (Carlson, 1972). This perhaps could be the beginning of what has commonly been referred to as organizational inbreeding, or the inability of an organization to implement new ideas, programs, or initiatives (Rebore, 2004).

Furthermore, the actions of a place-bound administrator are oftentimes predictable. Their patterns of behavior and philosophy are known to subordinates, and their commitment is not to the position but, rather, to the community. This is an important facet in discussing place-bound administrators, because the implications are potentially quite important. Individuals who are place bound tend to place value on their district, the social history that exists with subordinates, and the community at large. These factors hold a much greater significance than the position itself. Therefore, place-bound administrators tend to demonstrate a tremendous commitment to the community and the school as opposed to the position and the profession (Carlson, 1972).

Carlson (1972) placed a strong emphasis on male dominance in the field of school administration. The field of educational administration was, like most managerial positions, shaped by the experiences of men and the expectations that society held for them. The workplace was a sanctum of sorts that allowed men to live independently of their familial responsibilities, relieving themselves of such duties as child-rearing, arranging for medical care, and household chores (Grogan, 1999). Male administrators were responsible as the sole breadwinner for the family, and their disengagement from family was not viewed negatively but, rather, was an expectation held by society (Grogan). Long hours and dedication to the job were the earmarks of managerial success. This model of male dominance shaped the role of school administration and helped define the position. Long hours at work, dedication to the organization, and, in the case of career-bound administrators, the ability to simply pack up and leave a position for greener pastures and greater prestige were admirable traits.

Obviously, American society has changed significantly in the past 50 years as gender roles have become much different than those of the first half of the 20th century. The increases in single parents, dual careers, and involvement of fathers in everyday family life, which include activities previously associated with motherhood, have changed our society. However, many positions in society have been shaped literally by our forefathers and still possess the characteristics of a strictly *male* position (Grogan, 1999).

Education administration is certainly one field that bears the expectations of a purely male institution (Grogan, 1999). School administrators are expected by society to be dedicated and fully vested in the district they serve. As energies are focused on the

district, so is time. This is time spent away from family. These concerns must remain in the background and must not interfere with school business. Certain hypocrisy begins to emerge as school administrators are expected to be good parents and active community members, yet tension is created for those who try to balance the demands of job and family with equal rigor (Grogan). Successful administrators of the past were oftentimes able to reach their pinnacle by being supported by a partner or spouse whose participation in traditional motherhood expectations allowed him to concentrate fully on school administration (Grogan). When examining the world in which Carlson (1972) wrote, where men dominated and defined the role of school administrator, it is easy to see why the reasons that resulted in the place-bound category had little interest. The role was simply what it was, and it was the action of the individual that resulted in their place-bound status.

The world has changed dramatically and yet there are still place-bound and career-bound school administrators. Certainly forces exist that may actually determine in which category a school administrator will place him/herself. Dual income spouses have a particularly difficult time relocating for a new position. Oftentimes, school administrators have an income secondary to their spouse, so relocation for the sake of professional advancement is not a sound financial move. Furthermore, school administrative positions are much harder to obtain in any geographic location, which limits a dual income family's efforts at relocation (Grogan, 1999). It is these forces that act on school administrators and result in place-bound status that need to be examined more fully in order to understand the complexities of internal hiring and promotion. The theoretical construct that this study will use to examine these forces and how they order

the lives of individuals in their professional activities is the qualitative theory of institutional ethnography.

### Institutional Ethnography

Social life of humanity is not a chaotic exercise of disconnected events but, rather, is highly organized construct in which individuals are able to assign meaning to their existence through the daily activities in which, as social animals, they are participants (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). It is the participation of individuals in the everyday normalcy of social interaction that institutional ethnography seeks to explore. By examining the everyday, institutional ethnographers seek to determine which forces act in such a manner to shape the behavior of individuals. Knowledge of these forces is useful in developing an understanding of how individuals fit into the larger societal web and how the actions of individuals are oftentimes the result of larger institutional forces as opposed to the actions of an individual (Campbell & Gregor).

Traditional sociological inquiry oftentimes concentrates on ruling institutions in society and how they in turn influence the actions and behaviors of individuals. Institutional ethnography differs in that the focus of the research centers on events from everyday life. Incidents and actions that occur during daily life are actually shaped by larger forms of social organization that are not necessarily evident. Therefore, the task of an institutional ethnographer is to discover how these everyday events are formed by larger social forces and how the coordination of these activities come together in a cohesive pattern that acts in concert with achieving institutional objectives (Grahame, 1998).

The creator of institutional ethnography, Dorothy Smith (1987), referred to the examination of everyday life activity as “problematic.” That is, the events of daily life are perplexing and complex. Yet, however problematic, and in fact enigmatic, these events may be, upon examination daily life and human interaction reveal a sophisticated coordination of activity that is tied to dominant forms of social organization (Smith, 1987). The approach of institutional ethnographers differs from traditional methodologies in social science research by focusing on the experiential activities of individuals in daily life. Traditional social research oftentimes examines the practices of formal ruling organizations and how these forces act upon individuals in society to affect behavior. This approach lies in the positivist tradition and is oftentimes reliant upon quantifiable data to sustain its validity. Much of this tradition was rooted in the “Chicago” school of sociological inquiry that emerged at the University of Chicago in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Chapoulie, 2004). Smith (1987) has created a methodology that is contrary to this notion.

The approach taken by Smith (1987) was to reject the positivist notion that social science can and should be objective. Positivists generally believe that distancing the researcher from subjects is the only way to avoid bias. Conversely, Smith (1987) has argued that by distancing oneself from subjects, researchers cannot analyze the everyday and ordinary snapshots of people’s lives that form the basis of institutional ethnography (Mann & Kelly, 1997). The result is an ontology in which Smith (1990) argued that knowledge is constructed by people in the social world who hold a distinct understanding of the world and its social constructions.

Smith (1987) argued that traditional sociology has been dependent upon examining the world through the framework of dominant or “ruling” institutions (Grahame, 1998). Therefore, sociology would examine how societal institutions, such as the government, media, family, and religion, organize, shape, and govern behavior within society. Smith (1987) presented a model that again, redefines this model. The challenge of an institutional ethnographer is not necessarily to examine the ruling entities in society but, rather, to begin with the examination of everyday life situations (Smith, 1987). By examining and dissecting the actions and events that occur during what may be considered the ordinary and even mundane, researchers can then discover how ruling forces actually operate on individuals and affect social organization (Grahame). A reverse model is therefore created in which a researcher examines everyday life in an attempt to discover how and what ruling forces act on individuals as opposed to the traditional sociological method of examining the world through the lenses of these institutional entities (Smith, 1987).

The emphasis of institutional ethnography is the focus on how everyday experience is socially organized. Once this is observed, it is the function of the ethnographer to understand how this organization operates around a specific function. By determining how these forces operate in a situation, it can be determined that ruling forces actually transcend the incidental and, in fact, occur in many places and locations simultaneously. This allows the formation of the ruling apparatus of society (Wright, 2003).

Perhaps the greatest challenge of institutional ethnography is to determine what ruling apparatuses act on the individual and why. In order to examine the relations of the



organization of ruling forces, institutional ethnographers utilize the foundational premises of social organizational theory and Marxist paradigms. This approach leads institutional ethnographers to discover that social relations manage and control people's lives in such a manner that individuals are unknowing as to their actual influence (Wright, 2003).

What begins to emerge is the careful examination of ruling relationships in which power is a force that is perpetuated across multiple sites (Wright). What becomes evident to institutional ethnographers is that this pattern of behavior is neither disorganized nor chaotic but, rather, is a sophisticated, unconscious mechanism of purposefully ordained behavior (Wright). Therefore, the examination of power becomes an important aspect in analyzing how ruling relations are transported and perpetuated.

An important aspect of analyzing power and social relations in institutional ethnography is the recognition that it is different from the traditional notion of a relationship between individuals. The construct of social relations in an institutional setting is not something that is *done* to people or *happens* to people. Rather, people *are* these social relations (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). As noted earlier, human beings are social animals. Their participation in society is not voluntary, but rather, is an unavoidable facet of existence. Individuals participate in the power and social relations of institutions unconsciously, rarely reflecting upon the mechanisms of social control that act upon their lives. It is the participation of individuals in the social contract that results in the ordered exercise of daily life without opposition or even forethought. However, it is when calamities arise that individuals can begin to reflect upon the sophisticated complexity of everyday existence (Cambell & Gregor).

*Application and Construction of Institutional Ethnography*

The development of an institutional ethnography does not follow a particular prescription in advance for its approach to a research problem. A general idea exists as to *what* is going to be explained, but not *how* this is going to be done. Institutional ethnographers do not plan questions, research problems, or subjects in advance but, rather, pursue the analysis step by step, deciding throughout the process of obtaining the information what the methodology will be. Researchers DeVault and McCoy (2002) likened the approach to “grabbing a ball of string, finding a thread, and then pulling it out . . .” (p. 755). It is this approach of pulling threads of information from a societal structure and then determining what the implications are for social research that oftentimes make ethnographic research problematic.

Further complicating the research of institutional ethnographers is the barrier of the term “ethnography.” The common perception of the field of ethnography is that it is akin to anthropological methods of studying groups of people in their native surroundings. By examining the behaviors and lifestyles, a naturalistic ethnographer records and interprets how the particular social microcosm functions (Grahame, 1998). Institutional ethnography does not take a naturalistic approach. Rather, institutional ethnographers seek to explore the experiences of individuals as a beginning toward unraveling the metaphorical ball of string referenced by DeVault and McCoy (2002). By examining the lives of individuals, institutional ethnographers can begin to develop insight into how the thoughts and actions of these people are shaped by forces larger than themselves. As institutional ethnographers discover these experiences they come closer to

the ultimate goal of determining how social organizations relate to ruling institutions (Grahame, 1998).

Campbell and Gregor (2004) posited that determining the relationship between the everyday activities of individuals and ruling institutions is the ultimate objective of institutional ethnography. Data must be collected at the local level through a variety of mechanisms (narrative analysis, interviews, observations, etc.) and disaggregated in such a manner that the relationship to particular ruling organizations can be determined. By focusing on the experiences lived by an individual in a localized setting, institutional ethnographers can begin to determine patterns of social organization that ultimately provide insight into the dynamics of ruling institutions (Campbell & Gregor).

The goal of institutional ethnographers is to develop conclusions regarding the ruling relations between an organization and the individuals who come in contact with its mandates, whether explicit or implicit. As a result, many organizations may feel threatened by research that is conducted by institutional ethnographers because, by its very nature, it is designed to disturb and describe the ruling forces and dynamics of the organization (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). Similar to the Marxist tradition of sociology, institutional ethnographers seek to determine the ruling forces that organize and, perhaps to a certain extent, control the lives of individuals (Grahame, 1998).

How data are collected during an institutional ethnography differs from other qualitative and quantitative methodologies in that the information being collected needs to identify that a parallel strand of experience is also taking place in another site by other individuals but is attributed to the same social forces. Although traditional ethnography may seek to find recurring patterns of behavior or perceptions by a group of people in a

particular setting, institutional ethnographers seek to identify the same recurring patterns in multiple sites (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). By demonstrating that a pattern exists in the world that may be attributed to a larger social organization and particularly influenced by ruling social forces, institutional ethnographers can begin to explain an existence that is shaped by these largely unseen entities. This ontological foundation, in which people's lives are coordinated by social forces beyond their own consciousness, is the very heart of what institutional ethnographers seek to explore and discover.

The purpose of analysis is to present a clear and convincing analysis of the data collected (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). As in many qualitative methodologies it may appear easiest to disaggregate data by sorting, sifting, and coding the various accounts of individuals obtained through narrative analysis. What needs to be emphasized through the analysis of data is the determination that social relations are central toward institutional analysis. Analysis must be made in context to the examination of the everyday experiences of individuals and extrapolate from these the social relationships that form the fabric known as functional complexes (Campbell & Gregor).

### Summary

It is against this backdrop of literature that the study of internal promotion within a public school will be examined. By taking into account the relevant contextual information regarding internal promotion, place-bound theory, and institutional ethnography, this study will examine the complex experiences of individuals who have been promoted internally as building principals and examine the complex social forces that act on them in such a manner as to affect, shape, and define their professional existence.

## CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to analyze the experiences of individuals who have been promoted internally from teaching positions to building principalships. It is by the examination of these experiences that greater insight into the dynamics of internal hiring could be gained. Furthermore, through analysis of these experiences, the larger societal forces that act on building principals in such a manner as to influence their career paths could hopefully be ascertained.

The research questions being asked were:

1. What are the experiences of individuals who were promoted internally from the classroom to position of building principal?
2. What factors prevented internally hired principals from seeking administrative positions in other school districts?

As previously mentioned, the original intent of this study was to employ a mixed methodological approach in which quantitative measures would be employed to examine the perceived efficacy of internally hired principals as compared to their externally hired peers. As the original methodological approach began to quickly unravel, it seemed that the research questions being asked were those that simply could not be quantified. The topic was leading toward a somewhat murky area in which inferential statistics were rendered insignificant. Thus, a qualitative approach was deemed much more appropriate to fully answering the questions that were being posed.

The reason for employing qualitative analysis in this study was the nature of what was being examined—the significance of the experiences of individuals who have

ascended to the principalship internally. The nature of this study delved into the social constructs that act on individuals in such a manner as to influence their daily lives and their professional decisions. To analyze experience and unveil social forces acting upon the individual is oftentimes a matter of interpretation that cannot be discovered through conventional naturalistic means. The goal of this study, as with most qualitative research, was to investigate and discover how humans construct and perceive social reality (Esterberg, 2002). It must also be understood that qualitative research rests upon the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals interacting with their world (Merriam, 2002).

As with any qualitative study, the issue of objectivity is certain to be questioned. Yet in dealing with social research, in which human behavior and interaction is studied, pure objectivity is impossible to achieve (Esterberg, 2002). Feminist researcher and founder of institutional ethnography Smith (1987) asserted that pursuing objectivity in the social sciences leads researchers to feel indifferent toward what they are studying. Social researchers should not feel indifferent toward what they are examining and, when in fact objectivity and social research are pursued, the end result is a view shaped more of the worldview of the researcher than the subject. And although interpretations of a particular set of experiences may change over time, questioning the validity and objectivity of qualitative studies, the importance of social research in the qualitative sense is to interpret a set of experiences at a particular point in time and in a particular context (Merriam, 2002). This study sought to examine the experiences of internally hired principals and determine what social forces shaped their behavior and career path at this particular place and time.

### Methodological Approach

This study sought to examine the experiences of internally hired principals through the lenses of place-bound theory and institutional ethnography. In order to accomplish this, a methodological approach needed to be employed. The means through which this qualitative study accomplished this was through the use of narrative analysis. Narrative analysis relies on the interpretation of data by assuming that the stories, reflections, and language conveyed by subjects and how a particular narrative is relayed have deep significance and meaning in revealing deep truths regarding social reality (Esterberg, 2002).

Narrative analysis has a long history in the realm of social science research, particularly in the field of anthropology and educational studies. The basis of narrative analysis is to believe that a story has broad cultural context and meaning (Merriam, 2002). It is not earth shattering to believe that, throughout human history, stories have been used to convey a deep sense of meaning in such a manner as to explain existence or any of the myriad of human emotions. In many ways, stories have allowed the human race to explain their existence and identity. Narrative analysis in this particular study was used to discover the social forces evident in the lives of the subjects. By listening to the stories of those who have been promoted internally and asking them to reflect on their experiences, emerging themes that pertain to encompassing social forces could perhaps be determined.

### Participants

Again, the primary objective of this study was to seek *qualitative* data that would provide insight into the dynamics of the internal hiring of building principals. It is the

individual stories of the principals, who have experienced internal promotion, that are the centerpiece of this research. By examining the narratives of these individuals and identifying common experiences as they pertain to internal advancement, these collective snapshots provided valuable insight into the dynamics and nature of internal hiring and the social forces at work that perhaps resulted in them seeking positions internally rather than externally. By identifying individuals who were beneficiaries of internal hiring and analyzing their individual experiences with their cohorts, the social and organizational dynamics that affect these individuals could be examined in such a manner as to determine how their individual perceptions, philosophies, dynamics, and relationships were affected by this experience. Particular emphasis was placed on how relationships with their teaching peers evolved as a result of their promotion and how the principals' own perceptions toward the school district began to change due to their assumption of new responsibilities. Also, the principals were asked to reflect on why they chose not to seek administrative positions outside of their district but, rather, continued to remain committed to the district in which they had originally been employed as teachers. The principals were asked to reflect on their experiential changes that occurred within their districts and how their roles, attitudes, and very lives began to change as a result.

Selecting internal candidates for this study was difficult. Identifying *who* qualified was not as difficult as ascertaining *why* they should be studied. It was determined that only 4A school districts, (the largest forty-eight school districts in the state of Iowa), would be selected for this study. This was due to the fact that these districts have a larger pool of administrators from which to choose. With more administrators in an organization, both internally and externally hired, a greater breadth of experiences could



be drawn from as opposed to smaller school districts in which few administrative positions exist and fewer comparative experiences could be drawn. The superintendents of all 4A school districts in the state of Iowa were invited to participate in this study. Several districts indicated their willingness to participate, and three were selected. Those selected were done on the basis of the perceived enthusiasm of the superintendent in assisting in the study. In each of these districts, internally hired principals were identified by the superintendent. The superintendent simply supplied a list of candidates who were internally hired and offered no other recommendation as to who should be interviewed. The identified individuals were contacted and asked if they were willing to participate in the research. When they indicated that they were willing to participate, arrangements were made to interview them in their home districts.

#### Data Collection

Five principals were interviewed in the course of this study. Each interview took place in not only in their district of employment but also in their assigned building and in their respective offices. In order to prepare for each interview, the principals were contacted ahead of time via telephone and email. Dialogue was exchanged with each principal in order to establish rapport prior to the actual interview in keeping with established qualitative practices of personalizing the interaction with subjects (Esterberg, 2002).

#### *Interviews*

The narrative analysis of internally hired principals was accomplished through the analysis of interviews conducted with the principals. Again, interviews took place in the respective offices of the principals. A semi-structured interview protocol was utilized in

order to develop guiding questions but not necessarily inhibit the conversation by employing cumbersome questions that did not match the transitions of the conversation. A semi-structured approach frames general questions and concepts throughout the interview but allows the researcher the ability to let the subjects express their own ideas. Using a semi-structured interview allows subjects more freedom to express their experiences and ideas in their own words without hindrance and allows for a much freer exchange between the subject and the interviewer (Esterberg, 2002). Each interview was tape recorded.

Within days of each interview, a transcription was made from the tape-recorded conversations. Following the completion of each transcript, the tape-recorded interview was played as the written transcript was reviewed in order to check for clarity and the accuracy of the content. A copy of each transcript was provided to each principal in order for him/her to review and make corrections. This process of “member checking” allows subjects to exercise their freedom and comment on the interview as well as clarify any misconceptions or errors that may exist in the transcript (Merriam, 2002). The principals all responded positively toward the transcript and also added comments regarding the interview. Most of these comments were thoughts that had entered their minds in the days following the interview and, by sending the transcriptions back to them, not only were the conversations clarified, but further dialogue with the principals continued.

### *Coding*

After the completion of the transcriptions and member checks, the process of coding the information began. Coding information is a process in qualitative research in which the researcher tries to make sense of the data through the identification of

emerging themes and common strands of information that occurs across the various interviews. The identification of emerging themes does not necessarily mean that the data are quantified. Qualitative research does not identify common strands of information emerging from interviews in a quantitative sense but, rather, emphasizes the identification of data that could yield meaning (Esterberg, 2002). The importance during the coding process is to notice relevant phenomena, collect examples of the phenomena, and analyze such phenomena in order to determine commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Open coding was utilized in this study. Open coding is a mechanism by which phenomena are named and categorized after the identification of a possible emerging theme (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). By assigning codes to strands of information that existed in more than one interview, the process of determining meaningful data was much simpler. For example, the word “home” was used as a code word to collect data that pertained to the personal lives of the principals. These data were collected and organized under one heading, and then it was much easier to determine whether or not common strands of data in fact existed that would yield meaningful data. Likewise, “relationships” was used as a code for the relationships that were mentioned between the principal and subordinates in order to determine if an emerging theme in this area occurred. By developing a system of open coding, the identification of emerging themes was made possible.

Oftentimes, qualitative research is criticized and dissected on the grounds of “reliability.” Reliability in the realm of research means, generally, the extent to which research findings can be replicated. Quantitative analysis lends itself well to the concept

of validity because statistical tests can, in fact, be replicated, repeated, and recurring. No such redundancy exists in qualitative research largely because ethnographic studies deal with human behavior and observation, things that simply are not predictable, and in fact, it cannot be expected that an interpretation of qualitative data can be replicated (Merriam, 2002). Actually, one must be willing to accept the fact that multiple interpretations may, and do, exist when analyzing ethnographic information. Reliability, therefore, is not the goal of qualitative studies. That is not to mean that analysis is left to the creative devices of the researcher. Rather, qualitative analysis strives for consistency. Researchers must determine that the results are consistent with the data collected (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

### *Triangulation*

After the data were collected, coded, and emerging themes identified, it was determined that one piece was missing in the research. Although a considerable amount of data were collected and emerging themes identified, a component seemed absent from the conversations held with the principals. It was a very powerful dialogue that took place without exception in each interview. But after the identification of the emerging themes and the initial application of theory to these themes, it appeared as if a voice was not heard in the conversation. That was the voice of the superintendents. Oftentimes the principals would reference actions taken by the superintendent on a number of initiatives and decisions. The principals interviewed were adamant about their perceptions of the superintendents and displayed a great deal of confidence regarding their interpretations of the motives of the chief executive officer of their respective districts.

Yet as important as superintendents seemed to be in the conversations of the principals, they were a silent presence. They had no voice or recourse. After reflection of

this phenomena emerging from my conversations with the principals, it was decided that that two of the superintendents should be interviewed as a part of the study. Although three superintendents were available, it was decided that only two should be interviewed in an attempt to provide more anonymity in the study. This would in part provide for triangulation. Triangulation is the use of more than one research strategy in order to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the other (Esterberg, 2002). By interviewing the superintendents and applying the same processes used with the principals, the strengths and weaknesses of the narratives could be uncovered. It must be emphasized that this was done for the purpose of triangulation only and was not meant in any way to detract from the original premise of analyzing the narratives of the principals who were internally hired. This study is of them, not the superintendents. However, briefly analyzing the narratives of the superintendents was intended to enrich the stories of the principals.

### Conclusion

Against this backdrop of literature and methodology, the examination of the dynamics of internally promoting teachers to building level leadership could proceed. It must be emphasized that even resting on theoretical foundations and assumptions, the primary focus of this study was to hear the narratives of principals who have gone through this process and how this has affected their lives. By hearing, and even more importantly, by listening to these narratives, insight could be developed regarding how this experience affected not only their lives, but the dynamics of the job they perform. Furthermore, by listening and employing the aforementioned methodology, the social forces that act upon these principals could be identified. And by identifying these forces

and how they influence behavioral dynamics, greater sensitivity and awareness into the application of internal hiring could be gained, which will be useful in the application of such a process in the hiring of public school administrators.

CHAPTER 4  
ON THE INSIDE LOOKING IN:  
THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNALLY HIRED PRINCIPALS

The primary purpose of this study was to analyze the narratives of individuals who have been internally hired as principals. By listening and reflecting on the stories of those who have been internally promoted, greater insight into this phenomenon could be generated that will hopefully serve as a guide for school districts who utilize internally hiring as a part of the succession planning process.

Five individuals were interviewed regarding their experiences as internally hired principals. The individuals were interviewed in their respective schools during the course of a normal school day. Utilizing a semi-structured interview process each principal was interviewed regarding his/her experiences. The names of the individuals and their respective schools and school districts will remain anonymous. All five principals consented to be interviewed, and although they were all aware that their respective superintendent knew that they were being studied, four of the five were adamant that their comments regarding their district not be conveyed to their superior. They also requested that any other information that could lead to them being identified by their superintendent be altered in such a manner as to insure their anonymity. This was assured and provided a level of comfort during the interview in which the principals felt free to discuss their experiences and views without the fear of identification and possible judgment from their respective superintendent. There appeared to be a shared sense by the principals that some of their comments, if identified by their superintendent, could lead to possible retribution.

In addition to interviewing the principals, the superintendents of the cooperating school districts were also interviewed. It was originally intended that all three superintendents be interviewed in order to determine their perceptions regarding the practice of internal hiring and how they pursued this within their respective districts. Yet after hearing the pleas of the principals not to include any information that may lead to disclosure by their superintendents, it was determined that only two superintendents would be interviewed in order to provide a greater sense of anonymity and perhaps security for all the individuals involved in this study. The superintendents were interviewed in the same manner as the principals, and their insights into internal hiring as a method of succession planning were discussed. The interview of the superintendents also provided triangulation to the study as perceptual issues that were raised by the principals could be addressed by the superintendents. However, it must be emphasized that the primary purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of the principals as they reflected on their transition within a district from classroom teacher to principal.

Without exception each principal interviewed was a highly committed administrator, particularly to the district he/she served. Each principal took enormous pride in his/her building and after spending an hour or more being interviewed, each offered a tour of their building. Initially it was interpreted that this was being extended as a courtesy. However, after going on three tours it became apparent that the tour or offer thereof was a sincere reflection of the pride each administrator had in his/her building. It was a demonstration of affection for the students and teachers they served and may have been meant, after sharing at times very personal information regarding their experiences, validation of to what they commit their lives.



### The Experiences of Internally Hired Principals

The following narratives, reflections, and analysis provide valuable insight into the dynamics of internal promotion. The narratives are organized into themes that began to emerge after analysis of common strands of data. By analyzing the experiences of these individuals a snapshot is created regarding the use of internal hiring as a human resource tool in public school management. Their individual responses provide information regarding the use of internal hiring as a viable strategy in filling vacant building leadership positions as well as examining the forces that have resulted in individuals being internally hired and not seeking external administrative positions.

#### *Reason for Seeking Internal Promotion*

The reasons the five principals sought administrative positions were quite varied. After successful tenures as classroom teachers each principal's entry into an administrative position differed somewhat. In one case a principal did not actively seek the position but stated, rather, the position found her. In all but one case, the principals had secured a master's degree in educational administration. Usually these degrees were obtained in hopes of either obtaining an administrative position in the future or simply for the sake of professional development and advancement on their respective teaching salary schedules. However, all of the principals identified factors that made them feel somewhat bound geographically to the district. Circumstances existed in each of their lives that resulted in their perceived inability to relocate for a building level leadership position in another district.

One principal viewed her entry into administration as a new challenge in her career:

I was getting at the point where I was beginning to look more globally at things and I felt confined in my classroom. I think that my true love will always be with the kids. So I think that was the hardest part for me. I really did see the value of the teacher . . . you make the most difference for a kid. But I was at the point where I was just ready to work more. I guess [work] globally with the teachers and the kids. I was really interested in the change process and having been in [the district], you know going to school here and then obviously wanting an administrative position, just being able to see that change over the years. . . . I was really interested in becoming a part of that.

In this case the individual was determined to advance to a position in which decisions could be made at a more systemic level. There was a desire to affect the culture and climate of a building in such a manner that extended beyond the confines of the classroom.

This particular principal felt a strong loyalty to the district having lived in the community for her entire life and then having taught for several years in the classroom. She chose the opportunity to remain in her district rather than seek a position elsewhere. The reason was simply that she not only felt committed to the district that had hired her as a teacher, but also perceived constraints in her life that resulted in her feeling place bound.

I did not seek a position outside for a couple of reasons. One, my family was here and although there are many communities around, I was really wanting to be in [this district]. I guess the main reason I really wanted to be here was because I really believed in what we were doing educationally for the kids. I really felt

strongly in [the superintendent] and what his approach was for the school. I knew that there was a collegiality in the administrative staff. At the elementary level I wanted to be a part of that. I also . . . community-wise . . . I grew up here and my kids have grown up here so I have an interest in the community and I guess mainly I felt already I belonged with it and wanted to stay here.

The desire to remain close to family was an important reason why this principal chose to seek a position in her district. But there was also a strong commitment toward the district based on her teaching experience that also contributed strongly to the desire to remain. Certainly, her commitment to the district's vision played an important role in seeking an internal promotion.

Another principal echoed the exact same sentiment. A master's degree was obtained primarily for the sake of professional development. When an opportunity arose to advance to a principalship, the decision was made based on the following:

I went to [the district] as a child. I started when I was 5. All of my teaching experience was there. I was just committed to the district. I liked what the district did in terms of providing a good strong education for children. I felt comfortable with all of that. I never was interested. I never had planned to look outside of the district. And actually when I went back to get my administrative endorsement I wasn't even sure I wanted to use it . . . it was just, I just enjoyed classes and going to grad school and I thought it would just give me a different perspective.

Again, the loyalty to the district based on a lifetime of experience as a student and a teacher played an integral part in making the decision not to seek a position elsewhere.

This loyalty to the district was mentioned by all of the principals as being the primary reason why they chose not to look elsewhere for such a position. Yet they also brought up other factors as reasons for remaining. As stated earlier, perceived factors that limited mobility were mentioned by all of the principals as well. The primary consideration was that of a working spouse—mobility limited due to the income and career goals of a spouse being the common denominator. One principal had a spouse with a governmental position that resulted in multiple moves over the course of a few years. When their children began school in the district in which she was teaching, the couple made the decision to forego further transfers in her husband's career in order for their children to achieve a level of stability within a school district. This resulted in a feeling of being tied to the district. Another principal reflected on his own childhood in which his father's position as a federal employee resulted in multiple moves and school changes during his school career. Not wanting this to occur with his own children, he and his wife made the decision to remain in the community regardless of the position he held in the school.

Without exception, all of the principals identified strong family ties that prevented them from relocating. Extended family in the area, elderly parents, and the desire to keep their children in the schools they currently attended and provide an element of stability prevented them from moving to another community for the sake of professional advancement. One principal's wife had survived cancer. Given her ongoing health needs and benefits from her employer, it was felt that relocating for an administrative job elsewhere was not a viable option. All the principals indicated that they would have been happy to remain as a classroom teacher in their respective districts if it meant preventing

uprooting their families. Place, rather than position, seemed to be the foundation for future career preparation among all of the principals.

Another strong factor in creating a feeling of being place bound was the career of a spouse. Relocating for the sake of professional advancement would undoubtedly upset the careers of a spouse. All of the principals interviewed had working spouses who were successful in their respective careers. The loss of income, status, and goals of a spouse were incompatible with relocation. This keeps with research regarding limited mobility due to spousal career obligations. Oftentimes an individual's ability or willingness to relocate for an administrative position is made difficult by the existence of a second income and career goals of a spouse (McAdams, 1998). The experience of one principal is quite telling of the reasons for remaining in the community:

I just . . . I had some strong ties to [the community]. I had two kids. . . . I had moved around a lot as a kid and felt it was important that we stay stable and in one area . . . two daughters. One graduated in 1998 and the other one graduated two years ago from [high school]. My wife has a great job and to pack everyone up and move them did not seem like a great idea. I will stay here as long as I can. I will be 52 years old in July so I don't have that many years left before I can retire. My long-term goal is to hopefully work for [a university] as either a director or in the office for a couple of years. My wife still has a great job, she is a regulatory affairs officer . . . she works with governments to get their licensing and products throughout the world, and we both want to stay in the area until we retire.

Clearly the general motivating factor for seeking or accepting an administrative position within their districts was a deep sense of loyalty by the principals. During each interview, an incredible sense of loyalty toward their district was evident. It was obvious that all of these individuals felt a powerful commitment toward the community and the district in which they had been a teacher and simply sought an avenue by which they could contribute their professional talents in a manner in which they could continue to serve a district with which they had such a powerful relationship. One principal, when asked if being hired internally rather than externally was a detriment or not responded:

Well, I think anytime you move . . . I mean sometimes you go to a new community and you move in as an administrator. I had to move from a student, to a teacher, to an administrator in the same community and I think, you know the bad side about it is that I always felt not necessarily that you have to prove yourself but that, I guess I would have to say that you have to prove yourself because no matter what you always have [been] people perceive you in different roles and its hard for them to perceive you in a different way than what they are used to seeing you in. When you work side by side with teachers you are in one role and then when you move to being an administrator, a totally different role. [The transition] was hard for me because of the perception.

An interesting aspect of this principal's perception is that even though she did not move to another district, the change in the role was the same as if she had moved. Changing roles within the district resulted in having to "prove" herself capable as a building level leader. She was quite convinced that her experience being promoted internally would

have been the same had she changed district. The challenge of adjusting to a new position was exactly the same.

Another principal became quite passionate when asked whether internal hiring helped or hindered an organization. During his response, he became quite animated in his belief that internal hiring was beneficial to the organization:

We know the people. We know the families. We know the kids. We know the backgrounds. We know where all those skeletons are buried at and where all those things are that could hurt us or help us. Somebody coming in new might bring in new ideas and challenges, it's hard to say. I think it has helped us. We have some strong people here that have turned into principals committed to the district and the community.

This principal repeatedly referred to internally hired principals as “we.” His insistence that internally hired principals have a better knowledge of relationships within the district assumes that this translates into an increased ability to serve students and families. Although admitting that an external hire may bring new ideas to the school district, this principal felt that relationships and familiarity were more important. This principal also conveyed a sense of powerful commitment to the district that cannot necessarily be translated into words. Again, his repeated use of “we,” meaning internal hires, was a powerful statement of how he perceived the district and the ability of his peers to deliver instructional leadership compared to external hires.

In two instances principals did not seek a building level position but, as one principal stated, “the position found her.” Dynamics within the district, as well as the timing of the vacancy, were such that a decision to fill the vacancy needed to be done in

an expedient manner. The experience of one of these principal certainly gives great insight into the use of internal promotion as a tool to fill a position in a timely manner in order to ensure orderly operation of the district:

It was not my career goal [to become an administrator] . . . it was not my career goal. I was teaching 4<sup>th</sup> grade and had a master's in effective teaching from Drake. An elementary principal took a position in another district in late July and accepted the position in August. So, the district was needing a principal for the building I was teaching in. [The superintendent] spoke to the principal and asked who in his building he thought could do it for a year. And so he gave my name. When the superintendent called and asked about being principal for a year, I said I didn't want to do it! He said he wanted someone to do it for just a year . . . just to get us through until we can get a search committee together until we can get ourselves organized. It's just too late in the year to try to get a committee together, advertise, to interview, and to hire before school starts. School is starting in three weeks. "Could you do it for a year? Could you do it for a year?" I said, "Well, ok I'll do it for a year but will I get my classroom back? Ok, ok I'll do it for a year." So I scrambled for 3 weeks getting ready to take the job . . . interviewed for a 4<sup>th</sup> grade position, hired somebody for my job, and in the meantime I contacted Drake and thought, "I wonder how many hours I would need to get an Administrative degree – an Administrative Master's from Drake?" So I started the principal job. At first I hated it . . . I thought, "I don't want to do this."



In this case, the individual was not seeking the position but was identified by her outgoing principal as possessing the qualities that would translate into being an effective building level leader. Given the timeline under which the district was operating, a vacancy needed to be filled in a short amount of time. The availability of a qualified individual on staff allowed the district to fill the vacancy with as little disruption in services as possible. This may lend credence to the thought that organizations may be wise to implement succession strategies in order to cope with such a situation. By identifying capable teachers who either possess the qualities or the certification to serve the district in administrative capacities, individuals can be placed in such a position and district initiatives can proceed relatively unencumbered (Pounder & Young, 1996).

Another important aspect of this particular narrative is why the principal accepted the position. Content in her role as a classroom teacher for many years, she was faced with a decision that she didn't want to make. She did not aspire to be a principal and when offered the position was quite frank in her response that she did not want to be a building principal. Yet she did agree to assume the position for one year. It is obvious that her commitment to the district and her own school was so great that she was willing to sacrifice her own wants in order to assist the district in a difficult position given the timing of a late resignation. When the position was formally opened a year later, the decision needed to be made whether or not to apply. Candidly, she told her staff that:

. . . if I wasn't selected that was perfectly ok with me. I was happy in the classroom . . . don't think they had to pick me. I was happy being a classroom teacher. So I went through the interview process and they interviewed seven for actually two openings at that time. I was selected. So I was in it for the long haul!

*Changing Relationships*

As the principals entered a new phase in their professional careers, they all began to see established relationships change. The challenge for each of these individuals was not only adjusting to a new position and the challenges that this brings, but also identifying the undeniable fact that established relationships began to evolve as the result of his/her new position. It is particularly important to examine this aspect of internal hiring in order to discover the challenges that such hires face. By examining the reflections and experiences of those who have undergone internal advancement organizations can become better prepared to assist and support those who are promoted.

The principals were asked to reflect on the changing nature of relationships in their organization after they were promoted. In each case, the principals spent a considerable amount of time reflecting on their relationships. The discussion of relationships elicited a number of emotional responses during the course of the interviews. Asking them to reflect on their relationships brought a variety of responses yet, without exception, a great deal of emotion occurred in each. In one case, a principal succumbed to tears, and the interview was temporarily suspended in order for her to regain her composure as she shared her story of friendships dramatically altered due to her advancement. School districts need to be aware that individuals who advance from the classroom to an administrative position will be faced with challenges in their relationships that can be quite dramatic. If internal hiring practices are adopted, districts need to be cognizant of this and adopt appropriate supports to inform and assist administrators during this period of transition.

A particular challenge for both a district and an internal hire exists when multiple internal candidates exist for a position. One principal experienced such a circumstance. It was a difficult position for her to be faced with as she discussed:

There were actually three other people interested in it. Two of them were also teachers in the same building where I was teaching. One was a good friend of mine and we had gone to Iowa State together and got our administrative endorsement together. The other person who was a candidate had been in the district for many, many years and was thought of as an outstanding teacher and had done lots of things not only for the building but for the district. Served on lots of committees and served in many, many leadership roles. Very active in the community. It was interesting. I guess personally I felt there was one candidate just because of the years that she had, and like I said, her commitment to the district in terms of lots of leadership roles, her involvement in community, would have been maybe the choice that they would have made. And I was like “I’m off the hook, I did what I needed to do. I applied, I didn’t get and I’m going back to the classroom!”

Yet, after applying and going through the interview process, she was chosen as the principal. Her narrative continues:

And the one person that I felt probably deserved it. She was very up front and honest with me in terms of telling me that she was hurt by the choice and said that she was happy for me but it had hurt her. So that changes the relationship. I remember that day vividly coming back after the announcement was made because, well everyone wanted to say congratulations to me. There were two

people in the building that didn't get it and so, I think it was difficult for people to balance that, expressing their "sorry you didn't get it" to the other two people.

Obviously, this is a difficult position for any individual to be in. Three individuals from the same building applied for one position. One candidate was perceived as having more experience and, in many ways, may have been the better principal. However, one person is selected and the others are relegated to their former positions. When hiring externally, obviously there is no personal contact between the various job candidates. Applications are screened, interviews scheduled, and a decision is made to hire. One candidate is offered the position and the others are informed that they have not been selected. They continue with their professional careers oftentimes unknowing of the circumstances surrounding the decision. However, when multiple internal candidates are interviewed and one is offered the job, all individuals must coexist in the same organization, always cognizant of the fact that they were not selected ahead of the individual who was. This obviously creates the potential for relationship challenges not only among the candidates but also within the organization as alliances of sorts analyze the decision and the performance of the successful candidate. This particular individual was quite candid when asked if her relationships had changed as the result of being internally hired:

Yes. Absolutely. I have thought a lot about this over the course of the years. The relationships have changed significantly and I don't know if it's so much position or place. I was more guarded and they were too. And you know it would come up in conversations and people would jokingly say that "oh, that's right, I can't share that with you because you are a principal," or "you are now the enemy" or "you

are now on the other side.” I think it’s difficult . . . it changes the dynamics of the relationship. It’s those things that are said in a joking kind of way that you think . . . I know they are presenting it as a joke but I know there is more to that.

This reflection is quite powerful. In fact, when discussing this aspect of her experience, the principal began to become emotional, shedding tears, and the interview was ceased for a short period of time. It is imperative to understand, from a hiring perspective, the dynamics that are involved when making a hiring decision. Life-long relationships were altered as the result of the advancement into administration. The principal endured comments made by former lateral peers that “I can’t share that with you because you are the principal.” Although these comments may be made innocently enough, they speak volumes as to the recognition that roles and responsibilities have changed. Friendly, professional relationships, although perhaps maintaining collegiality, were changed due to the inherent power relationships that exist between teachers and administrators. A twinge of sarcasm and cynicism in these types of comments is certain recognition that former relationships have changed. No longer are the individuals equals but, rather, divided by responsibility and a perceived element of power.

What is important about this reflection is the need for organizations, particularly those responsible for human resource decisions within a district, to understand the complex changes in relationships that occur when the decision to internally hire is made. Individuals who were previously teachers and who find themselves in administrative roles will undoubtedly discover that their friendships have been altered due to their new status. This also speaks to the isolating nature of school administration. Having the

support of a multitude of fellow teachers changes drastically as one enters administration, which tends to be lonely and isolating (Gaff, 1997).

Another principal spoke to the difficulty of changing relationships by stating:

When you become a principal there are things you cannot share because of confidentiality, the time commitment. So those kinds of things that used to be normal teacher talk, you can't be in that any more. I mean you have to be very careful of things that you say or, you know even the time that I don't have to give to friendships as I used to. I think on a personal level that has been hard. The difference is that I had friends who were teachers, and to some degree, I have lost some of those friendships, the closeness of those friendships. You spend time so more isolated as an administrator, and even though you have friendships and even though the teachers in my own building, you still walk a fine line between professionalism and personalization. It is just difficult. It is lonelier being an administrator.

This narrative provides insight into the experiences that one can expect if hired internally and is much like the previous narrative. Due to the changing nature of the role, administrators have a professional obligation to be less sharing with teachers than they had been prior. What was once "normal teacher talk" is something no longer extended to the principal, which results in facing the realization those roles, and thus relationships, have changed. Working in isolation is also alluded to by this principal and is perhaps more difficult for internal hires. Suddenly, everyday exchanges of pleasantries, work gossip, and other expressions of camaraderie are altered by a change in roles.

Not all of the experiences regarding relationships were necessarily negative, however. One principal felt that his hiring was a validation of his competence and dependability. Having taught in a building where the principal had missed many days due to a serious family illness, administrative duties had been relegated to him in the principal's absence. This demonstrated to the staff that he was a competent administrator and loyal employee of the district. When the position opened, he was the only internal candidate interviewed and faced competition from three external candidates:

I think it was such a strong support for me from the people in the building, from the secretary to the custodian to all the staff members that the . . . it kind of overwhelmed the interview team . . . it was made up of all the people that wanted me. And the others [candidates] I don't know how the interviews went with the other people, I wasn't privy to that and shouldn't be. It was just a matter that I was the one that they wanted. They felt that transition between me and [the former principal] that was there before . . . because I was the one in charge when [the former principal] was gone and his wife had cancer and I was always there. [The hiring committee] thought, "You could always count on J\_\_\_ because he was always there. He makes the right choices."

Another principal, who had not sought the position and was named an interim for one year due to a late resignation, viewed her first year as an interim quite differently than later, when she was hired as a principal. During the first year as an interim, having been hired only 3 weeks before the beginning of the school year, she viewed her relationships quite positively:

I had worked closely with people at [school] because I had been there 6 years. I think that first year I told the staff that I am an intern principal, but we won't tell the kids that because I don't want kids to think of me as being a short-timer. I am an intern principal but we won't tell the kids that. I am guessing that maybe in the beginning that is the way they looked at me, as an intern principal and but I always did tell the staff there, "You made it work." They made it work. The staff at [the school] is very professional. It is kind of a medicine for you. They made it work. They gave me the respect. They told the kids I was the principal and they would pretty much honor what I would say. They would work together. They were very professional. They were respectful, they supported me. We didn't always agree but they would always listen and work hard to do what I asked them to do.

Yet the second year, after being named the principal, relationships did begin to change. The moniker of "interim" was gone and the reluctant principal was no longer so. Recognized as the building leader and not a "lead teacher" burdened with administrative responsibilities, the relationships began to evolve:

I was still friends with a lot of them but I probably didn't do social things with them . . . it wasn't proper to do social things with selected friends like I used to have. Yeah, there is still a couple there. When I would do surveys of the staff, one of the frequent criticisms was that I have favorites. It was perceived that I had favorites. There were certain people that we just had lots of things in common. We always were close. So one of the criticisms I would get on my evaluations was that I had favorites.



As staff evaluations began to indicate that some teachers were given preferential treatment by the principal it was evident that relationships had changed. What had once been friendships, based on personal interests, likes, and similarities, were no longer being perceived as such. Once the power relationship changed, the staff no longer recognized them as friendships but, rather, as favoritism. When asked if she felt this would have occurred if she would have been hired externally, this principal stated:

No, it would not have been the same. No. Because we would not have had the background to be friends. Dorothy for example. Dorothy is a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and we taught together. We went through a master's program together, we have kids the same age. We did a lot of things socially together. So I'm sure [the faculty] thought Dorothy got preferential treatment because we were close. As for preferential treatment, Dorothy is a super star. Dorothy is an outstanding teacher. So, it is hard to separate between because she is an outstanding teacher or because we were friends. Whatever she asked for she got. Well that's not true. Dorothy is an outstanding teacher.

The principal became quite defensive and adamant in her discussion of favoritism, particularly when it pertained to Dorothy. A longtime colleague, their friendship extended outside of school and included their family experiences. They attended the activities of their children together, went through a graduate program with each other, and spent a great deal of time socially with one another. Their lives had a deep personal bond that had been recognized by their fellow teachers over the course of their professional lives. Furthermore, Dorothy was an excellent teacher. When the subject

became the principal the relationship was perceived differently by the faculty. No longer was Dorothy the friend, but rather, Dorothy was the favorite.

This is a strong factor that needs to be examined when adopting internal hiring policies. When individuals have long-standing personal relationships with individuals and then are elevated to a position of authority, the relationships undeniably are altered. They may not be altered by the actual friends but are transformed by the perceptions of others. It is this threat of staff jealousy that may occur if internal practices are employed that oftentimes prevents organizations from employing such tactics (Boulton & Coldron, 1998). As this narrative demonstrates, there certainly is validity to the fact that internal forces may act in such a manner as to adversely affect the climate in a building.

### *Knowing Too Much*

One shared experience that emerged among all of the principals was “knowing too much.” All the principals shared that one of the drawbacks of being internally hired was that they knew too much about the individual lives of their staff members. Not only did they know their teachers as teachers, but they also knew them as parents, community members, church members, etc. This became particularly difficult when dealing with difficult personnel issues. One principal shared this reflection:

There are a couple of teachers . . . oh, one in particular is not a good teacher, not a good teacher at all. My kids had her and I knew she wasn't a good teacher so eventually it got to be kind of ugly where I had to tell her that she was not doing a good job at all and she cried and would cry and cry and cry. It was difficult. But by that time I pretty much held my ground and I was past the point of trying to be her friend. That was tough because I had her kids in school in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, she had

my kids. It got to the point where she was harming kids. She needed to get out and it got ugly.

This is a rather poignant reflection due to its complexity. Two co-workers who taught in the same building and each have had the other's children in the classroom. They have been peers and even, perhaps, friends. However, the principal has a perception regarding the professionalism of the teacher based on the experience of her children in the classroom. As a parent, she has come to realize that this woman is not meeting the needs of her children. Then, she becomes the principal. What is blurred in the narrative is whether or not the principal came to the conclusion that the woman is a poor teacher based on professional observation or from the lens of a parent whose children had what we can only assume to be an unpleasant experience in the class. It can also be assumed that the faculty also had the same blurred perception. Was the principal acting as a professional or trying to "get even" with a teacher due to an unpleasant experience with his/her child? Was the teacher truly a bad teacher or the recipient of a malcontent parent who happened to be an administrator? Although this issue can occur with externally hired administrators whose children progress through the classrooms they administer, internally hired candidates may face more scrutiny for their actions which may be interpreted as "get even" tactics, particularly when unpopular decisions are made, rather than acting in the best professional interests of a building.

But even being familiar with the faculty does not necessarily prepare an internally hired principal for some of the challenges that occur regarding staff relationships. As the role changes the dynamics between individuals also change to meet the expectations of

the role. One principal discussed her surprise at how willing people were to discuss their personal problems with her once she became the principal of an elementary building:

I didn't realize that there were so many issues out there. That it was so complex. I didn't realize and this is going to sound like kind of a negative thing and I don't mean it to be that way at all . . . I didn't realize that people walked through the doors being employees, students, families, AEA people, I mean ANYBODY with the baggage that they do and that kind of ends up on your desk. And some of it they are willing to tell you and some of it you need to know and some of it you don't, but it's amazing.

Prior to being a principal, this individual knew her co-workers well. Upon becoming the principal, she was surprised to learn how little she knew. As she assumed her new responsibilities faculty members and other support staff became more willing to share the most intimate details of their lives, a situation she was not prepared for. She also began to see the behavior of her peers in a markedly different fashion:

[I had] two teachers. They go in order. They have a time assigned to go to lunch and one of them went ahead of the other and I guess they got into . . . they got into a shoving match . . . a fist fight over who went first and who was supposed to and who wasn't. I couldn't imagine that stuff like this went on but then you get to the bottom of it and there was this history of something that started . . . they used to be in the same card club together. So they were coming every day with all this anger and resentment towards each other. I didn't know that I was supposed to schedule them so that their classes did not go one after the other. Yeah, I mean vividly remember going home and thinking "I can't believe I even have to deal

with something like this . . . these are adults.” Again that is the baggage that they walked through the day every day and I wasn’t aware of and basically that I am aware of it. They are both still here.

Even though it could be assumed that an internally hired principal would have a better knowledge of the dynamics of a staff due to previous experience, this reflection is important in highlighting the fact that with a position, there perhaps comes a different perspective that one needs to have in order to understand the social dynamics of a building. As a teacher, this particular individual may well have known that a personality conflict existed between these two teachers. Perhaps it was teachers’ lounge gossip, snide comments being exchanged, etc. But when placed in a position of authority in which the expectation is to govern and, to a certain extent, control the behavior of employees, she had no idea that the relationship was such that the two needed to be separated in the lunch line! Her perspective began to change toward all of her co-workers as their behaviors and attitudes began to align with her position as a principal.

#### *Perception of Central Administration*

As teachers move into administrative positions, they also are brought into closer contact and association with the central administrative apparatus of the local district. This relationship also begins to change. The principals all felt that when they were teachers they were far removed from the central administration and had little personal or even professional contact. In several cases central administration was viewed with a sense of mystery. As explained by one principal:

Well, I perceived administrators differently according to, I guess, the relationships I had with them working on different things [as a teacher] but I tended to think

they were more of an unit of their own and I always wondered what they did all day . . . you know where they were and what they did and sometimes I didn't feel like that when you would go to them that they would be as supportive and you know, you know when you have a need as a teacher it's like the only need—you know that's the only thing you are focused on and when you move to the principalship you realize that's one out of a hundred. So, I perceived them as kind of their entity in what they were doing and I knew they were close but I didn't always feel with the teachers. Then when I became a principal I realized that closeness was there for a reason because you do rely on each other so much and that's who your network is. I just wondered sometimes where they were or what they were doing, you know those kinds of things. And then when I became a part of that I realized. . . .

Another principal echoed the same sentiment of central administration. As a teacher, she had very little contact with central administration unless it was on a curriculum committee or other function. Interestingly, her view of the central administration would change twice in her career as a principal:

Central administration prior to being becoming a principal was kind of out there and I didn't really deal with them unless I was on some type of curriculum committee So then after I became principal I would say I view Central Office as more than as a support and now I view them as a necessary evil.

In this particular instance, central office was the distant, unknowing entity as a classroom teacher. Initially as a principal, it became a great support to her as she began her administrative career. However, as time lapsed and she journeyed from a novice principal

to a seasoned veteran, her view of the central administrative function again changed and she came to view it as a “necessary evil” and admittedly, retreated into a self-imposed isolation from the central office using it only when necessary.

Central administration as a “mystery” was echoed by another principal who, as a classroom teacher, remained distant and detached from the central administrative apparatus. As he transitioned into his administrative responsibilities, he began to understand the central administrative functions better, yet always remained guarded:

My contacts with central office weren't very much as a teacher, maybe committees, etc. I wasn't in the inner circle. I wasn't sure how it functioned.

When I became a principal I still wasn't sure how it functioned until I got into see who knew what and to find out who were the answer people downtown . . . who could I call and trust to get the answers downtown. I was very impressed the first couple of years with the people downtown, but I've been told when you are a new principal you will get the things that you need, they will be good to you and then things start to roll . . . and that's how things went. I wasn't surprised. Central Office was a support but wasn't always listening.

As this principal began reflecting on his perception of the central office, he also began to share his perceptions of the relationship between the board of education and the central office. His view of the relationship between the board and the superintendent provides a great deal of insight into his perception of central administration:

Well, the last superintendent we had used the Board as an excuse for many things, or would push the Board in front of him and the Board said this and the Board wants you to do this and the Board wants you to do that and the mistake he made

is that I know the Board and I've know them for years and I've talked to them and they had not said that stuff and not really done that stuff . . . it was just kind of using them as a front. I always got along with the Board . . . always tried to do what they asked us to do.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this reflection is the concept that as a long-time community member who lived and taught in the district prior to becoming an administrator, a different perspective and relationship had evolved with the board of education. The principal felt he knew the board as people, not as an abstract, impersonal group and, therefore, had greater insight into their beliefs and perceptions. This came into conflict between himself and his superintendent, as he perceived the superintendent using the board as a "front." Internal hires may develop personal relationships with community members long before a superior is hired. This may serve, as in this principal's reflection, to alter the relationship between a central office administrator and a principal. Access to the board members was obviously much easier due to relationships that had been long established in the community.

#### *Reasons for Staying in District*

Having completed successful tenures as principals internally hired in their districts, each subject was asked if he/she aspired to seeking positions elsewhere, either as a principal or a central office administrator. Interestingly all of the principals conveyed that they did not intend to seek another position nor did they ever envision leaving the district for another position. Their reasons were varied but, without exception, all expressed a commitment to their district and community as the reason why they may



never leave. When asked if he would ever seek a position in another district, one principal simply said, “Because this is home.” Another stated:

I am happy with what I am doing. I feel like I am successful. I am not a person who is motivated by money so that is not going to work for me. And a central office position would not work for me. So, no I don’t see that I would ever leave this district. And part of is the history, the success. If I was going to make a change it would actually be the other way. I’ve had conversations in the past about going back to the classroom—going in that direction, but in the district.

Besides the commitment to the district and community, others cited issues such as family and home ownership as important reasons not to seek a position elsewhere:

Because we built a house here. Probably because I cannot replicate my salary in another district and because I don’t want to drive a long distance. I don’t want to go to Central Office. My end is being a principal. I don’t intend to go to Central Office. I intend to retire from this position. I don’t intend—I’m getting too old to learn a new job. We live here, our kids go to school here, we built a house here, we like our house. I think probably—now I don’t know what other districts pay but I’m guessing I don’t think it would be enough for us but I think I probably get the best for this area. No, I’m just going to stay here.

In three cases, the potential for increased salaries was not an incentive for the principals to leave their present districts. While talking off tape, one principal showed me salary comparison data of the administrative pay in his district compared to others statewide. In comparison, the district ranked among the lowest in class 4A schools in the state of Iowa. The principal was clearly concerned about administrative salaries in the

district and the need to find mechanisms that would increase the level of financial support for the administration. Yet when asked if he would leave the district for a similar position that would pay far more than his present salary, he was quick to state that he would be hesitant to leave for salary reasons alone.

It is important to note that financial incentives alone are not the driving force that would draw candidates from their position in a school district to another. This is an important item that must be considered by human resource officers charged with hiring administrative staff, particularly from an external hiring perspective. All of these individuals were highly successful in their current positions and would probably be valuable assets to other districts in need of sound and experienced administrators. However, all of them expressed reasons other than money for staying in their present positions. Home ownership and family were the most common responses aside from the sense of commitment that they felt to the district. If districts are to lure successful, experienced principals from other districts, the incentive package cannot be based solely on salary and benefits.

#### *Salary and Benefit Issues*

During the course of the interviews, the question of salary and benefits did occur. This was not a planned question but something that resulted in the first interview that became an interesting discussion for all principals. This was certainly a benefit of utilizing a semi-structured approach toward interviewing given that the following strand of information became a valuable aspect of the analysis. The principals reflected on whether or not they felt the motivation to hire them internally was the result of a concerted plan by the district to institute cost reduction measures. After all, each district

had experienced a certain degree of student enrollment declines over the past several years that had resulted in the reduction of programming in other areas. When administrative vacancies occurred there may have been some thought to hire internally in order to save money. By hiring internally, central administration could offer a teacher a higher salary and benefits than those being earned in the classroom yet not have to pay as much to entice an external candidate who has to factor in such expenses as a home purchase and other related relocation costs. Each principal felt that this was certainly a factor in internal candidates being given strong consideration in their districts.

When this question came up during an interview, one individual matter-of-factly admitted that the district hired her to save dollars because, “they knew I was cheap.” Another individual felt that the district was beginning to take advantage of internally hired administrators by allowing a salary schedule to be created that was not competitive with other school districts. Furthermore, younger administrators had received a higher salary settlement the year prior in order to compensate for increasing family insurance costs, whereas older administrators received nothing. Leveling her criticism at central administration she felt that the district was taking advantage of the fact that internal hires (which made up the bulk of administrators in the district) due to the fact that they were not going to leave their employment with the district. Knowing this, she felt that central administration was keeping salaries purposefully stagnant:

Whatever [central administration] can do to save money. You know they would save money. . . . That was a big complaint last year because the younger ones now are having families and they weren’t getting their family health insurance paid. So they upped their salary but did not up everybody else’s salary. I don’t think we are

as competitive for salaries as we might be and I think the ones [externally hired] . . . they are looking. [Another principal] is from the area, they own a house, her husband's from the area, they aren't going to leave. They are pretty stable people when hired internally. So they are probably going to stay whatever the salary.

Yeah, they're going to save money. That's me. I'll stay.

A certain degree of bitterness is evoked by this principal as she discusses the fact that internal hires, due to the multitude of circumstances that prevent their mobility, are somewhat manipulated by central administration into accepting lower salary settlements than would occur if they were externally hired. The result was internally hired principals staying while their external peers looked for jobs that had a more competitive salary and benefit package.

Another principal, who had been a strong proponent of hiring internally, spoke with the same level of bitterness toward the use of internal hiring in order to save money.

[Finances] could have been [the reason]. I was hired at \$48,500, which was pretty low and I think we have hired a large majority of internal people which has saved us money but now have hurt us because we have very few internal candidates to hire for administrative jobs and we may have to hire outside.

When the tape recorder was off, this principal returned to the issue of salary and benefits for administrators in the district. He began discussing at length his criticism of the district's salary and benefit package for administrators compared to other school districts. He began showing me comparability data he had compiled showing how his district was deficient in relationship with cohorts in similar sized districts. Interestingly enough, all principals save one in this particular school district were hired internally.

When presented with this fact this principal agreed that the district's reliance on hiring internally may actually have been a strong contributing factor in the salary and benefit schedule becoming less than competitive. It would only seem logical that in this district, the competitive nature of administrative salaries is meant to lure teachers from their classrooms and not necessarily to entice them away from administrative positions in other districts.

*Principals' Reflections on Being Internally Promoted*

All the principals were asked to reflect on being internally promoted and whether or not they felt it was a viable human resource strategy. Having experienced the changing nature of their role and being able to reflect on their experiences, this question evoked differing responses. Yet, as varied as the responses were, this single question evoked a great deal of emotion from the principals regardless of their opinion of whether or not they felt internal promotion was a valuable hiring strategy. One principal was quite critical of the continued use of internal hiring by stating:

I am one to grouse a little bit about it even though I've been one to benefit from it. . . . I think to keep the district fresh you need to bring in people . . . you need to bring in some outside candidates . . . there's got to be that balance. And I agree that this district does a lot of promoting from within. And you got to do that because you want people to know that if they are committed to the district that there is that chance that there would be some payoff but if you always promote from within your missing out. There are other ways. I know that sounds really funny to hear me say that because that's what . . . I guess I want to see change, I just want it to be somebody else. I just don't want it to be me!

As a recipient of internal promotion and a very dedicated sense of commitment to the district, this candidate was critical of the perceived over reliance of internal hiring by the district. The concern is certainly that the district needed to hire “fresh” individuals in order to positively affect systemic change. At the same time, the principal recognized that internal hiring practices serve to recognize the talents of teachers who wish to advance. Yet the primary concern is that the district may be missing out by not hiring externally. In order to reinvigorate the district and cull new ideas, external candidates need to be hired. By relying on internal candidates the fear is obviously that the district will rely on internal processes without reinventing itself.

Even those principals who spoke positively about the use of internal hiring expressed concerns about the district becoming complacent or stagnant as a result. It was a concern expressed by all the principals. The fear of not growing professionally was on the mind of one principal who expressed concerns of becoming complacent and not exposing herself or other internally hired administrators to new ideas:

I think it's always good for people to get outside of their comfort zone a little bit and it is a comfort zone for me here. . . . I know the language, everything about it. And to some degree even in my own mind I would like to someday maybe pursue something outside of the district professionally for the growth of my own personal self. I think that's a good thing. Yes, I do think there are times that there is too much background in what you know and that it is harder to sit on the outside and look at the picture . . . kind of like trying to see the forest through the trees kind of thing. So yeah, I agree there is definitely some downfall.

Trying to see the forest through the trees was the overriding concern that this principal relayed. By only knowing her own institutional world both as a teacher and an administrator, a fear of not actually understanding the overall scope of educational practice and procedures was always present in her thinking. Understanding that there was a world outside of her district and aware that she did not know any other culture was a constant worry in her professional life.

Another principal recognized that internal hiring practices could lead to the district becoming stagnant but emphatically defended the practice in her district. Using multiple examples of where this had occurred she stated that the superintendent had created a culture in which he encouraged professional growth and, as a part of this, actively encouraged talented teachers to pursue administrative degrees. They in turn were rewarded with administrative positions in the district. Yet the concern of becoming “stale” was always present:

Internal promotions have to maintain a sense of commonality and common language because you know the process, you know a lot of the language, the process, and clientele, and culture but yeah at times I think we do have people come in with some new ideas. It's like a breath of fresh air. So we get stale, yes we do. But it's also kind of a mix . . . a balance of maintaining the culture we have and growing your own. But yet bringing in new . . . it's kind of a mix of old vs. new.

This particular principal recognized that new ideas oftentimes were generated by external hires and that the risk of relying on a strategy that internally promoted teachers to administrative positions was organizational stagnation. Yet she was quite adamant that

the use of internal hiring brought cohesion, community, and continuity to the organization. Furthermore, she truly conveyed a great deal of loyalty to her superintendent for encouraging teachers to seek administrative degrees and creating a culture in which professional development was rewarded and recognized by others in the district. This only strengthened her commitment to the district.

Yet other principals felt that internal promotion not only was good for them as individuals, it was healthy for the organization as a whole to have teachers promoted to positions of leadership. Citing his success as a teacher within the district, one principal stated:

I think there are advantages because you kind of know how the system works.

You've taught here and you know the culture, the climate, you know . . . the people. So I think there were a lot of benefits. You kind of earned . . . you kind of proved [yourself] as an administrator within the district as well.

Proving himself as an educator was an important issue for this individual. Not only proving that he could be an effective teacher, but also demonstrating to his peers that he was an able and competent administrator had tremendous intrinsic value for him. Truly he felt that this was healthy for the organization by providing an example of professional upward mobility that could be obtained within the organization.

Contrary to the experiences of most principal, one possessed particularly strong attitudes toward the use of internal promotion within a district. Not only did he feel that it was beneficial to use such a mechanism but he felt that the district should use this as an exclusive tool for hiring administrators. When discussing his views on the issue, this



principal became rather animated to the point of what can only be described as an evangelical fervor in his promotion of internal hiring:

You know what you got and you can make them into what you need to make them into. You've known them for a number of years and you know they are good people and that they are good with kids. You know they are in the community . . . their kids are in school . . . I think I have had an increased level of commitment—I only saw part of the picture—I only saw 20 to 30 kids in my room and not the school until I became a principal and not to the district until I became really more involved with district things. We have great—we've hired some absolutely wonderful people [internally]. I'm pretty satisfied with where we are heading.

Not only did this principal support the concept of internal promotion, he felt the district needed to accelerate its efforts at actively identifying individuals who possess the skills to become successful administrators and support them in achieving the means to make this happen by allowing them release time for advancing their education, etc. As he discussed this, he took the concept of internal hiring to an entirely different level by advocating the identification of teacher associates and community members who had the potential to become successful classroom teachers and implement measures that would allow them to access undergraduate resources to make this a reality, stating it was necessary to “grow your own.”

#### *Commitment to the Organization*

It is commitment to their respective organizations that ultimately gives a sense of meaning to the individuals who were interviewed. Without exception, all the principals conveyed a deep sense of loyalty to their organization. During each interview I began to

develop the perception that the commitment to each principal's district truly transcended that of a job and was instead, a deep, covenantal relationship that had evolved over many years. Perhaps the most heartfelt expression came from one principal who had been a student, teacher, administrator, and parent of children who had received their education in the district. Reflecting upon her "relationship" with her district she stated:

And all that [the district] has done for me both as a student, as a teacher, as an administrator, as a parent who has had children go through it and graduate from here. It defines me. And in return, the loyalty and commitment that I have to it, you know, it's been like a 39-year marriage between me and the district, and there hasn't been a divorce yet. I know that everyone is committed to their job but my commitment [to the district], it's who I am.

Comparing her commitment to the district as a "marriage" speaks to the overwhelming sense of duty and commitment that this particular individual has for her school organization. A life-long journey has obviously been taken with her school district through various stages of her life. By actually confessing that her identity is "the district" this principal is conveying a passionate loyalty to the district.

Another administrator interviewed also grew up in the same community, attended the school district as a child, taught, and became an administrator of an elementary building. Although organizational commitment was indeed evident, it was her loyalty to community relationships that had created a life-long bond that served as the foundation of her personal moral endeavor.

I think one of the great things about being here in the community is that I have established friendships . . . people in the community and I know them and I

honestly have to say that the parents have been very, very supportive of me. I don't feel that they treat me any differently as far as when I went from a teacher to an administrator . . . if anything they were probably more supportive and happy. I think that relationship has really enhanced me as an administrator because of the support I have.

Growing up in the community resulted in knowing parents and students and having a thorough knowledge of the community culture. When answering this question, this individual became very passionate about her community and its citizens. Truly, she felt that by being a "home grown" administrator there tended to be a greater sense of acceptance by the community and, in turn, enhanced her own sense of loyalty to the district.

Another principal used this question to reflect not only on his career, but on his life. When discussing the impact that being hired internally had on him, he began to discuss the impacts he had on the system and how he had been able to contribute to his community and profession as a result of his experience as an internally hired administrator:

Would I do anything different? You know I had some opportunities and for one reason or another they didn't work out but if they would have worked out my life would have been greatly changed . . . I wouldn't be here. My two kids have gone through the system, both of them very successful. . . . I wouldn't have made the impact in my community that I have made. No, nothing different in career moves. There were times when I didn't think I was ever going to get here and there were times that I gave up. I never felt that I was better than anyone else, or more

important than anyone else. I just felt that my function here at this building is to give every teacher everything they need to be successful and kids. And some days I don't see those successful people or kids. I see the ones that are unsuccessful and if I could change one thing I would like to generate more success for kids, to get them on the right road and to help us in the community and in the future.

### Summary of Themes

The reflections of the principals provided insight into the experiences that internal promotion provides. The collective reflections of the principals led to common themes that need to be summarized in order to fully comprehend the phenomenon of internal promotion of teachers to building level leadership positions.

#### *Geographic Constraints*

Each principal discussed to varying degrees the constraints that geography placed on their ability to seek administrative positions outside of the district they had been employed in as a teacher. Circumstances in their individual lives resulted in a perception of permanence regarding their district of employment. Such factors as home ownership, spousal employment, and extended family in the vicinity of the school district combined to create a feeling that relocation would be difficult emotionally and, perhaps, impractical from an economic perspective.

Perhaps the factor that was the strongest denominator among the principals that prevented them from seeking positions elsewhere were considerations revolving around the lives of their children. All of the principals were parents and expressed concerns that relocation may have on their children's emotional well-being. During the interviews, all the principals expressed concern and even remorse at the ramifications that moving to

another district may have on the lives of their children. This was a very powerful consideration in these principals' decision to remain in their school district either as a classroom teacher or as an administrator.

### *Commitment to the District*

Another theme that was evident in the interviews with the principals was the commitment that each felt toward the district in which he/she worked. A deep commitment that can be explained only as reverential was expressed by each principal during the course of the interviews. For two of the principals, this commitment evolved over a lifetime. Both had been born in the school district, attended schools there as a student, and returned as teachers. Their commitment to their respective districts can be explained only as covenantal. Both had forged a deep respect for their district based on their life experiences, which translated into an attitude such that relocation would result in something akin to heresy.

The other principals, who had not attended schools of the district as students but rather came to the district as teachers, also developed and expressed during the interviews a deep reverence toward their respective districts. The thought of leaving the district was not an option. A relationship had been developed with the district that transcended personal aspirations. All the principals expressed the view that their job was not necessarily being a principal in a particular building but, rather, was supporting the community and district in which they lived and of which they were a part.

### *Pragmatic Use of Internal Promotion*

Each subject interviewed also identified the use of internal promotion by central administration as a pragmatic function within the school district. Without exception, all

the principals mentioned that they viewed their own hiring as the result of practicality. Two individuals discussed how they had been hired as interim principals due to late resignations. Seeing as they possessed the credentials necessary to be principals, they received consideration and were appointed. Their temporary status became permanent upon demonstration of their competence as principals. The other principals felt that their hard work, initiative, and visibility within the district had resulted in their appointment to principalships.

Regardless of the reason for their individual hiring, all the principals interviewed felt that their hiring had been the result of circumstances that were practical at the time of their appointment. They felt that central administration acted expediently and with the best interests of the district in mind by hiring individuals who had demonstrated their commitment to the district in a variety of capacities. In the minds of the principals, hiring them made perfect sense. A known commodity was a safer hiring decision than an external candidate would be.

### *Relationships*

Perhaps the greatest emphasis that the principals placed on their experiences was that of relationships. Relationships obviously changed when each individual moved from the classroom to the principal's office. Friendships with other teachers began to evolve as the new principal came to be viewed as "one of them" (as one teacher referred to a principal). No longer were they "a teacher." They were "an administrator" and were in a position in which relationships, particularly power relationships, had been altered. All the principals expressed a certain feeling of isolation that manifested itself as a result of their promotion. Although externally hired principals may experience these same feelings, this

seemed to be magnified by these principals who had experienced promotion internally, due to their preexisting relationships with colleagues.

The changing nature of working relationships presented various challenges for the principals aside from the isolating nature principals may feel. One individual was placed in the position of asserting evaluative jurisdiction over an employee. This was made more complex due to a relationship between the two that had existed prior to the ascendancy of this individual to the principalship. Another principal discussed at great length how perspectives of teachers change from the vantage point of teacher to principal. And once an individual was in the position of a building level leader, when action of some sort was warranted, relationships and feelings could indeed be compromised.

Along with the evolving changing nature of relationships came the undeniable reality that the principals had preconceived perceptions regarding their peers that externally hired principals could not possibly possess. Too much about the lives, commitments, and idiosyncrasies of teachers were privy to the principals and could at time taint their perceptions toward subordinates. One principal tried in vain to start his/her position with a *tabula rasa*, believing that the less he/she knew about teachers, the better off he/she would be. This struggle with the familiar was a popular refrain among each principal.

#### *Central Administration*

The insights into central administration by the principals interviewed were particularly compelling. Without exception, all the principals expressed profound sentiments regarding their perception of the central office apparatus. When they were teachers, the principals had regarded central office as somewhat of a mystery. They were

far removed from the workings of the inter sanctum and came in contact with central office only through periphery work on curricular committees, etc. Once their elevation to administration occurred, their perceptions toward central administration began to evolve. Initially, each principal viewed central administration as a support to their mission as building principals. As time progressed, however, they began to develop views that can only be described as suspicious or, at best, guarded.

Of particular suspicion among the principals regarding central administration were issues of economics. Each principal felt that salary and benefits had been an ulterior motive in his/her hiring. They had the perception that they had been singled out by central administration as principals not just for their certification and qualifications, but also for the economic savings they could yield the district. The principals interviewed had developed the perception that one of the reasons they had been hired was the fact that external candidates may cost the district more financially. Whether or not a factual basis exists for this, the fact remains that the perception among the principals was quite strong.

### *Institutional Inbreeding*

Another theme that emerged among each principal was the concern of “institutional inbreeding.” Although each was grateful for the opportunity to rise from the teaching ranks to the principal’s office, each expressed concerns regarding the over reliance of hiring internal candidates. The fear of organizational stagnation weighed heavily on the principals. It seemed as if collective guilt was forming over organizational failures due to a succession strategy that relied too heavily on internal hiring. Yet one principal took an entirely different view on internal hiring by viewing it as a merit system for teachers. Achievement and competency were, in his/her mind, rewarded with



promotion. This led to a feeling that central administration needed to reach inside the organization and convert the talents of promising teachers to strong building level leaders.

### *Commitment*

All the principals interviewed expressed a deep devotion to the community and school district in which they served. Whether they were born in the community or moved to the district as a teacher, the principals discussed at length their dedication to the district. Some of them personalized their commitment to the district to such an extent that their jobs were a part of their very existence. As already discussed, one individual viewed his/her relationship to the district as a marriage. Referring to a job in such terms projects the deep commitment to the district that may transcend those of a typical job. In some ways, this feeling may reflect what Glickman (1995) referred to as a “cause beyond ones self” (p.42).

### *Conclusion*

The experiences of these internally hired principals provide a compelling tale in the realm of human resource decision making in public schools. By listening to their stories, and reflecting upon their insights, school districts can examine this hiring strategy from its merits and demerits when applying it as a part of succession planning. It is these experiences that will be further examined and explored as they pertain to place-bound theory and institutional ethnography. Furthermore, the experiences of these internally hired principals will be viewed from the perspectives of those how made the hiring decision, the superintendents.

## CHAPTER 5

## ANALYSIS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The narratives of internally hired principals provided a wealth of information regarding their experiences, journeys, and personal reflections on the transition from being a classroom teacher to a principal. The narratives begin to shed light on the experience and, in some ways, raise further questions regarding their relationships and perceptions of the organization.

Of particular interest were the principals' perceptions of central administration and their respective superintendents. As mentioned, four of the principals were adamant that nothing that would identify them would be revealed. They simply did not want their superintendents to know their thoughts, perceptions, and ideas, particularly if they were somewhat critical of either central administration or the district as a whole. In order to gain further insight into this relationship that seemingly existed between the principals and the superintendents, it seemed as if only a portion of the story was being told. An analysis of the dynamics of internal hiring must be examined from the perspective of the superintendents in order to gain a richer view of the complexities of the nature of internal hiring. The analysis of the superintendents' narratives also provides a means of triangulating the data obtained from the principals. By triangulating the narratives of the superintendents with those of the principals, the strengths and weaknesses of each can be clarified (Esterberg, 2002). Furthermore, the narratives of the superintendents provide clarity regarding the realm of place-bound theory and institutional ethnography.

### Place-Bound Theory and Internal Promotion

The narratives of the principals provided a strong sense that all were, for various reasons, place-bound administrators. The complexities of spousal employment, home ownership, proximity to extended family, education of children, and health needs of family members were some of the primary factors identified by the principals that resulted in place-bound status. Among the principals interviewed, none possessed a strong desire to seek administrative positions in another district and, in most cases, were content to have remained as teachers in their district if an administrative position had not availed itself to them. All but one of the principals studied raised concerns about the over reliance of hiring internally as part of a district's succession planning strategy and the possibility of institutional inbreeding. This issue was also a concern of the superintendents that were interviewed. One superintendent reflected on his/her concerns on over relying on internal hiring:

Well, I think you have to be careful. I think there is an advantage. I think you also need a blend. I don't think you can just internally promote constantly, I think you do need to bring in some fresh blood every once in a while. The superintendent, he or she really has to make a decision: "Does this building need some stability? Therefore let's promote internally," or "Is it time to look outside and bring in that fresh perspective?" I think you really do need a blend. I'm really glad we hired [two recent externally hired principals]. We have new blood in the district. We needed that infusion.

Another superintendent interviewed also raised doubts regarding implementing a hiring strategy that placed a greater emphasis on securing internal candidates:

Well, yes I do [worry about hiring too many candidates internally]. I think it's healthy to have external candidates hired but I don't think we do that exclusively. I think based on the position, there are some positions that I feel that going into the hire we need somebody from the outside coming in. That is not true of all the positions but it is with some positions. Depending on who the other top candidates are and my knowledge of their leadership experience and my knowledge of I guess my sense of what the distinct needs, what the building needs. I think you can become a little too inbred if you have too many internal hires, so I think you always need to have kind of a mix of external and internal candidates.

Both superintendents echoed the principals in their concern regarding the effects of hiring internal candidates exclusively. The concerns of the principals and the superintendents were the possibility that such an approach would result in organizational stagnation or the inability to innovate. The desire to hire external candidates by superintendents seemed to be a mechanism designed to bring fresh ideas to the organization. The majority of principals interviewed also recognized this as a necessity as well.

This perception of organizational stagnation or lack of innovation is an important component of place-bound theory (Carlson, 1972). The principals felt that the risk of hiring too many candidates internally could be the lack of new ideas. It was a concern shared by those hired and those who hire. The recognition that this was a risk when hiring internal candidates caused a certain degree of concern if not hesitancy among the principals. The collective fear seemingly was that an incestuous hiring process could stifle innovation if external candidates were not brought in from time to time to diversify

the gene pool. This biological allusion was actually used when several of the principals referred to external hires as “new blood.”

The risk of over relying on hiring internal candidates is institutional inbreeding (Rebore, 2004). Place-bound theory portrays such individuals as being somewhat predictable and conservative (Carlson, 1972). According to theory, place-bound administrators tend to lean toward conformity in an attempt to please subordinates as opposed to being independent risk-takers. The idea that an individual is a known quantity within a building provides a possible “comfort level.” Carlson identified this as a characteristic of place-bound administrators, and the perception of the superintendents interviewed would provide some substantiation of this claim. One superintendent’s narrative was particularly telling:

If they are only willing to stay in the district and not move to another district, then I think they are limiting their opportunities to get that experience. If they really want to be a building administrator they have to be willing to get that experience wherever they can. I think a comfort level in the district prevents them from leaving so, maybe not being a risk taker.

The reluctance to seek an administrative position outside of the district by an individual was perceived by this superintendent as being indicative of lacking risk-taking skills. There was no recognition that factors may prevent individuals from seeking positions elsewhere but, simply, that potential administrators who limited themselves to positions within the district were not risk takers. Adding to his/her concern regarding internal hires were the dynamics that are present when interviewing and possibly hiring a known quantity within the district:

Well when you're hiring somebody you have to . . . the staff itself might have a greater sense of loyalty to that person, whether they are an outstanding leader or a mediocre leader. If you're going to do some team hiring and involve a lot of people their input may mean that they are going with the safe candidate rather than one that might bring in the kind of leadership you need. Or it could be a barrier in that the person is an outstanding candidate, but because everybody knows them they don't necessarily want them to be the leader in that building.

This reflection echoes Carlson's (1972) belief that place-bound administrators tend to have subordinates that will "rally" behind them due to a history of shared experiences. The particular leadership qualities of the individual become less important than his/her past history with the district. A worry of this superintendent was the use of a team approach to interviewing/hiring in which peers had the opportunity to provide input. Being a recognizable entity in the district may become, according to this reflection, more important than the individual's competence. Contrary, however, to place-bound theory, was the superintendent's fear that being a known entity could actually be a hindrance. Knowing the candidate's past intimately may result in teachers rejecting him/her as a leader.

The principals interviewed did not feel that being hired internally indicated that they lacked risk-taking skills or were conservative leaders. On the contrary the principals cited their commitment to the community and district as their strongest leadership attributes and viewed their status as "known quantities" favorably. Their perceptions of being place-bound dealt more with situational issues inherent in their lives than with any

particular personality traits. This may raise criticism of Carlson's (1972) place-bound theory.

Carlson's (1972) research is nearly four decades old. Although the concept of place-bound and career-bound administrators has a great deal of credence and, perhaps, is undeniable, Carlson's reasoning for individuals placing themselves in these categories may be nothing more than quaint anachronisms. When reading Carlson's original research a very simplistic model was created in which an administrator (and in Carlson's research this is explicitly meant to be a man) chooses to be either a career-bound or place-bound administrator. Carlson did not fully expand on what factors exist that may result in individuals becoming categorized in one of these paradigms. In fact one can only conclude that Carlson felt that it was a choice to become either a career-bound or place-bound administrator and that he really did not delve into factors that may result in individuals becoming place-bound. In order to fully appreciate the dynamics of place-bound administrators, analysis must go beyond the differences that distinguish them from their career-bound cohorts and examine the factors and social forces that may have defined their role.

#### Economics of Succession Planning

When discussing their experience of being hired internally, several of the principals raised the issue of economics. A common strand of thought among the principals was the perception that their hiring may have been the result of economic savings for the district. Hiring them would, in their mind, for a variety of reasons save the district money. Several principals cited their status as place-bound individuals as a mechanism by which the district could save dollars. So deep did the emotion of this topic

run among the principals interviewed that it was only prudent to carry this thought to the superintendents as a means of triangulating the data (Esterberg, 2002). This was asked directly to the superintendents who denied this as a motivation. One superintendent interviewed believed that hiring was a wholly objective enterprise:

I'm always constantly looking at people that have good leadership skills. Be they classroom teachers, be they para-professionals, be whatever. I think I'm always on the lookout for people with not just good, I think, great leadership skills. So certainly in the teacher ranks we look at the leadership, the ability . . . all those characteristics of effective leaders. In terms of the potential for them to become either building principals, or if nothing else, start out as associate principal or assistant principals then, you know, maybe even work their way into head principals in a building.

This superintendent asserted his belief that when planning for succession, his primary interest was looking for individuals who have "great leadership" skills. At first it appears that his/her hiring strategy is neutral. Yet he quickly transitioned into a reflection on how teachers within the district may possess those "great leadership" skills that would make them effective building principals. Rather than risk placing them into positions as building principals, opportunities were afforded teachers to start off in lesser administrative roles such as assistant or associate principal positions in order to seemingly test their abilities. The issue of economic savings was not necessarily addressed directly but was perhaps veiled by a logic asserting that teachers who were identified as having leadership potential could be placed in such positions.



When directly asked whether or not financial considerations were a factor, the superintendent continued with his/her analysis of the hiring protocol by reflecting:

I think you make a decision whether or not you're going to replace the position.

That can happen, or are you going to combine it with some other principalship, or are you going eliminate say an assistant principal's job. But I don't think it's ever done. I don't think its fair to anybody to say that because I'm going hire a teacher who is in the district I'm going hire them cheaper.

According to this superintendent, the economics of succession planning did not rest with the individual when he/she was hired but rather, were made prior to the placement. When a vacancy occurred a decision was made whether or not to fill the position or eliminate the position through an attrition mechanism. It must be noted that in each school district that participated in this study, significant enrollment declines had been experienced in the previous 10 years. This resulted in the reduction of budget, which translated into loss of personnel. In this district, the superintendent emphasized that the decision to reduce costs was made prior to the decision to hire. Yet when these decisions are made there are economic ramifications attached to it that are known to all individuals within the school district. This may create the sense that any decision made during times of budget reduction is made purely for the economic savings that can be accrued.

Another superintendent interviewed took a similar approach toward succession planning by examining the qualities of subordinates within the organization. His narrative included the following thoughts:

I have a pretty good strong sense of the quality of the people who may be interested some positions. Some of the positions are considered, by me, to be

more entry-level kinds of positions . . . every position is a little different, and I know who typically, who would be a strong candidate for those positions, based on the position and their experience and quality it could vary from opening to opening.

Although not directly answering the question of whether or not individuals were hired internally as a means of saving money, the superintendent did assert his belief that he/she knew which individuals within the organization possessed the skills necessary for particular leadership positions. Like his/her cohort, a strong sense of knowing which individuals within the organization possessed the qualities necessary for an administrative position played an important part in how the decision was made. Yet as the conversation continued, it slowly began to evolve. The economics surrounding succession planning began to emerge:

If it's late in the year sometimes we will only go internal and will hire a person, hire them as an interim. The idea is that they tried for a year they get some experience, if it works out we will open it up again and they can compete against outside candidates. If they are very successful we will just move them into the position. And it's an advantage to them. They don't have to relocate, they don't have to move and we can give them some experience here at a fairly reasonable rate. If it's an in house person then great, we get to hire them at a pretty reasonable rate. So it's a factor but it really, we're always . . . our primary goal is to try to hire the best we can.

In the event of a late or unanticipated vacancy, the superintendent admitted to looking internally as a means of filling a position. The justification behind the decision

was to expedite the hiring process. The decision was interpreted as a benefit to both the district and the teacher. The district is able to secure a certified individual in timely manner and the teacher receives the opportunity to gain administrative experience. And, if the individual proves him/herself, the district will “just move them into the position.”

The narrative of this superintendent is remarkable in its ability to identify potential cost savings for the district while still clinging to a belief that the district seeks to hire individuals who have the desired leadership qualities. An admission is made in a seemingly implicit manner that finances are not a consideration when considering an administrative vacancy. Yet as the narrative progressed, the superintendent began to identify the economic savings that result from an internal placement. A telling comment from the narrative states, “If it’s an in-house person, then great, we get to hire them at a pretty reasonable rate.” This revelation may indicate that financial motivations exist when hiring decisions are made and could, in fact, validate the perception felt by the principals that their hiring was motivated in part by the financial constraints of the district.

Yet the superintendent did identify what primary cost savings existed when hiring internally. The ability to forego paying relocation costs was perhaps a cost savings to the district. But it is not necessarily the actual monetary savings accrued by the district that is important. It is perhaps, the recognition by the superintendent that the internal hire would not absorb the costs typically incurred during relocation: “. . . they don’t have to relocate, they don’t have to move and we can give them some experience here at a fairly reasonable rate.” The superintendent correctly identified the complexities of place-bound administrators (Carlson, 1972). Knowing that relocation carries an assortment of costs,

the superintendent utilizes this to his/her advantage by understanding that internally hired candidates are constrained by the parameters of their place-bound status.

### Summary of Themes

The interviews of the superintendents did provide some commonalities that provide insight into the nature of internal hiring as a succession planning strategy. Most obvious was the concern of institutional inbreeding. Each superintendent took a cautious view toward the overuse of internal hiring due to the possibility that institutional inbreeding could occur. Yet as hesitant as each of these superintendents appeared, it is interesting to note that internal hiring was a common practice in each district. A significant number of administrators were internally hired in each of these districts. This may raise the question of whether the superintendents were concerned about institutional inbreeding prior to the succession planning process or whether the fear of stagnation emerged after the implementation of this practice. This is certainly a facet emerging from this research that may need further analysis.

Although the superintendents did not directly address the issue of the use of internal hiring as a cost-savings measure, the economics of the practice was discussed. The superintendents recognized that utilizing internal hiring as a succession strategy would yield savings for the district. Although the actual savings of relocation costs may not be monetarily significant, the superintendents were aware that hiring internally could result in savings for the district. Yet the superintendents remained guarded in their assessment of using internal hiring as a cost-savings mechanism and were somewhat defensive when addressing the issue. A certain sensitivity existed when this subject was

discussed that may be more indicative of relationship issues between principals and central administration than actual economic factors.

The superintendents interviewed also discussed the problematic aspects of internal hiring aside from institutional stagnation. Each superintendent expressed concern over hiring known quantities as building administrators. One superintendent felt that hiring a known entity could be a problem for the simple reason that they are familiar to the staff. Familiarity with a teacher may lead staff members to develop preconceived notions about the individual that could hinder the hiring process. Conversely it was noted that staff may well prefer a candidate because they are known and are therefore “safe.” Each superintendent expressed hesitations about internal hiring due to the fact that elevating a person into a leadership position may have repercussions not experienced when hiring externally.

Principals and superintendents alike expressed unique views regarding the implementation of internal hiring as a succession planning strategy. Each entity formed perceptions that need to be framed in a theoretical construct in order to gain coherent insight. By examining the practice of internal hiring through the prism of institutional ethnography, a better understanding of the perspectives of principals and superintendents can be generated.

### Internal Hiring and Institutional Ethnography

Throughout this study the narratives of internally hired administrators and their superiors have been discussed and analyzed. Through the context of place-bound theory (Carlson, 1972) the attitudes, perceptions, and feelings of principals toward their school district begin to emerge. The principals provided reasons for their place-bound status and

what factors were evident in their lives that prevented them from seeking administrative positions elsewhere. Although the narratives provide ample evidence for place-bound status, what is not clear are the social forces that have acted on the lives of these individuals to create the conditions that have resulted in their place-bound status. Institutional ethnography provides a theoretical mechanism through which the activities of daily life are shaped by larger social forces (Grahme, 1998). By examining the narratives of the principals and superintendents through this lens, the social forces that act on their lives can be ascertained and a coherent view of how organizations and individuals are affected can begin to emerge.

#### *Family Structure, Organization*

The narratives of the principals provided a clear snapshot of the reasons why they felt place-bound. Each of the principals identified factors in their personal lives that prevented them from relocation. Or, if relocation was an option there would be significant impacts on their personal lives. During the time in which Carlson (1972) framed place-bound theory, it was not unusual for a spouse to relocate with her school administrator husband due to his role as the sole breadwinner. It was a much simpler task to accomplish; yet in today's world a more complex dynamic exists. Each of the principals who participated in this study had a spouse who worked full time. Relocating for the sake of an administrative position would have disrupted the livelihood of their respective spouses.

The issue of spousal career and income had a significant impact on the decision of principals to remain place-bound. Their decision should not be seen as a career choice but instead should be viewed as the result of socio-economic forces beyond their control.

Gender roles have changed significantly in the past 50 years. Along with changing roles has come an increase in dual income households (Grogan, 1999). In each of these narratives the principals cited the careers of their spouse as one reason why relocation was problematic. The resulting place-bound status is not necessarily a conscious choice made by these individuals but, rather, is a condition created by the changing social landscape. What once was a position dominated by men who were the primary (if not only) wage earner in a household has come to be a occupation in which men and women are participants with spouses who have successful careers and are not necessarily economically dependent upon the other.

The changing nature of gender roles that has resulted in the increase of dual income households has impacted the ability of teachers who hold administrative certification to relocate. During the past several years in the state of Iowa, a perception exists that there is a shortage of public school administrators. Yet statistics from the Iowa Department of Education, Bureau of Planning Research, and Evaluation (2006) indicate that there are far more certified individuals with administrative certification in the state of Iowa than there are positions. The issue of relocation and spousal employment may prevent teachers from relocating for an administrative position. Although the individual's income certainly would increase due to professional advancement, total family income may decrease. A plausible explanation for the perceived shortage of administrators may rest in the inability or unwillingness of individuals to move for this reason.

During the narratives of the principals, references were made by all regarding familial obligations that prevented them from seeking positions in an outside school district. What was not identified or discussed were the socio-political forces operating on

their lives that had shaped these experiences. Changing family structures and increased opportunities for dual income households have acted on these individuals in such a manner as to influence the course of their lives and choice of career (Grogan, 1999). Their place-bound status is the result partially of the vast changes that have occurred in society and continue to shape their livelihoods.

### *The Functional Complex*

During the course of the interviews of both principals and superintendents, the discussion of salary and benefits occurred. The principals seemed to have formed the impression that one reason why they had been hired was to save district resources. The superintendents denied this was the case (although one did admit to the advantages). A disconnect exists between the perceptions of the principals and the superintendents regarding the use of internal hiring as a cost savings measure.

This disconnect may be important in understanding larger issues that act upon each entity in a public school district. Again, each district studied had been in a period of contracted student enrollment over the past decade. Because funding in the state of Iowa is dependent primarily on enrollment, the declines had led to budget reduction. The reasons for declining enrollment in the state of Iowa are directly related to the decline of rural populations, an aging population, and urbanization. The population shift in the state of Iowa has forced school districts to make difficult budgetary decisions. The principals studied have watched this occur in their districts in their roles as teachers and administrators. They are obviously quite sensitive to the issues of budgetary reduction, and their perceptions have been shaped by this experience.



The superintendents felt that there was no validity to the perception held by the principals. They did, however, use interesting terminology for their hiring rationale. One superintendent said that his/her authority to set administrative salaries was determined by a “schedule.” Another cited a salary “range.” Both said that each was determined by the “district.” One principal referred to the “schedule” as being below average and was a tool of the “central office” to stifle salaries. The use of such descriptors is common in the field of institutional ethnography and is referred to as “texts” (Wright, 2003). As these texts are utilized by the participants of an organization, a pattern of behavior begins to form. The texts serve to implement initiatives and mandates and, in doing so, perpetuate a relationship between the individual and the institution (Campbell & Gregor, 2004).

The use of the texts “district,” “central office,” and “salary schedule” by the principals denotes larger forces that have shaped the organizational environment. In this situation, the perception that lower salaries are the result of declining resources is acknowledged through this pattern of texts. The examination of the relationship between these texts creates what institutional ethnographers refer to as a functional complex (Grahme, 1998). The functional complex defines how organizations operate and communicate the larger social forces that act upon them. Specific outcomes and individual behavior is the result of the operation of the functional complex (Grahame & Grahame, 2000). In many ways the use of texts in the school simplify the discussion of declining resources and budgetary decisions in a concise manner that is acknowledged by all through their use.

### Implications of Internal Hiring in Practice

Based on the research conducted, several implications for the use of internal hiring as a viable succession strategy in public education begin to emerge. The reflections of the principals and superintendents provide a glimpse into the workings of internal hiring and what ramifications may exist if school districts utilize this mechanism.

#### *Place-Bound Limitations*

The reflections of the principals made it quite clear that their place-bound status restricted their ability to pursue administrative positions outside of the district. Central office administrators in school districts need to be cognizant of the fact that aspiring administrators may be quite restricted in their ability to relocate. When a vacancy exists in a school district, human resource personnel must be keenly aware that the pool of external applicants received are career-bound administrators. Understanding Carlson's (1972) perspectives on the differences between place-bound and career-bound administrators may be helpful in understanding the characteristics of the applicants. At the same time, school officials charged with securing administrators must be aware of individuals within the organization who have the ability and proper certification to hold leadership positions.

#### *Economic Savings*

Although the superintendents remained somewhat cautious when discussing the potential cost-savings of hiring internal candidates, the perception was evident among the principals. Central office personnel need to be acutely aware that this perception exists among internally hired principals and seek mechanisms that could dispel this perception if it is, in fact, not a valid one.

Conversely, it cannot be denied that a school district can reap some financial savings from implementing internal hiring procedures. Although it was not explicitly stated during the interviews of the superintendents, enough implicit evidence existed that would lead one to believe that utilizing internal hiring could be a mechanism of saving resources. From a central office perspective, internal candidates can perhaps be hired at a lower salary than external candidates and without the associated relocation costs. Teachers who aspire to be building principals but are for various reasons place bound, can secure an administrative position without having to relocate. Although they may be paid less than an external candidate, when placed in the context of the restrictions that have resulted in place-bound status (i.e., family, spousal income, home ownership), aggregate financial savings may actually exist. More research into this particular aspect of internal hiring as a succession strategy needs to be conducted in order to fully discover whether or not this is in fact a significant phenomenon.

#### *Institutional Ethnography and the Implementation of Internal Hiring Practices*

More research needs to be conducted into the dynamics of institutional ethnography in the relationships of individuals in public schools. What needs to be known from this research is the fact that social forces are at work that shape the actions and behaviors of individuals. These forces are oftentimes beyond the control of individuals yet, in many ways, shape their livelihoods. Central office administrators need to look beyond internal candidates as individuals and, rather, reflect on the forces that may result in place-bound status. Carlson (1972) presented an image of the place-bound administrator as cautious and someone who was not prone to taking risks. Understanding

the larger forces that have resulted in place-bound status may dispel traditional notions of place-bound candidates.

Another aspect of institutional ethnography that needs to be examined further is the role of the functional complex at work in school organizations. Institutional ethnography examines the use of texts in the formation of a functional complex (Wright, 2003). How texts are used to form functional complexes is imperative to understanding the social forces at work in a public school district. Simply understanding that texts are used to form functional complexes may be important in developing insight into the social dynamics that act on individuals in an organizational setting. Education is obviously a field in which acronyms abound. Further study into how terminology can be used as texts to form the functional complex needs to take place in order to fully comprehend the powerful social forces that act on individuals in a public school setting.

#### *External Hiring Considerations*

This study concentrated on the experiences of internally hired principals. Future research needs to be conducted, however, into the experiences of externally hired principals. Although the reflections of the internally promoted principals in this study may provide insight into a unique experience, this should not necessarily be used to construe that their experiences are dissimilar from those of externally hired candidates. Future research needs to concentrate on the experiences of externally hired candidates in order to ascertain whether their experiences differ significantly from internally hired principals. Certainly, both internally and externally hired candidates experience many of the same transitions from the classroom to the principal's office. Understanding the

totality of the experience for internal and external hires may be prudent in fully comprehending succession-planning strategies.

More research also needs to be conducted into the perceived efficacy of internal versus external candidates. The superintendents interviewed in this study had seemingly developed the impression that internal candidates may be more cautious than their externally hired counterparts. Further analysis needs to take place in order to ascertain the validity of this perception. It may be prudent to utilize a quantitative analysis in order to determine the perceived efficacy of internally and externally hired candidates.

### Recommendations

This study of principals who have been elevated to their positions internally results in a series of recommendations for school districts to contemplate when utilizing this mechanism of succession planning. By listening and studying the reflections of the principals, several converging themes developed that may necessitate certain measures being taken during the implementation of this human resource strategy in a public school setting.

#### *Support System for Internally Hired Principals*

All principals interviewed discussed the changing nature of their relationships within the district. Upon hearing of the oftentimes emotional changes that occurred with the transition from the classroom to the principal's office, it would be prudent for school districts to be cognizant of the fact that even though the organizational surroundings may not change, the role that the individual assumes has profound implications for how he/she is expected to act, interact, and behave. The changing norms and relationships that occur are such that individuals who find themselves in administrative positions will need the

support of central administration to ease the transition. None of the principals interviewed had a formal support system for the transition into his/her position and, rather, were left to develop these relationships independently. Knowing that individuals hired internally undergo profound changes in their personal and professional lives, supports need to be placed in order to assist these individuals during this period of transition.

School districts may in fact take for granted the fact that principals hired from within need support. They do know the culture, the community, the norms of the organization, and the district's mission and goals. However, changing position to that of a leader rather than a teacher affects the manner in which each of these entities is viewed. Therefore it is imperative that the human resource apparatus of the district recognize that a mechanism of enculturation needs to be adopted if this hiring mechanism is utilized.

#### *Organizational Commitment and Identification of Potential Administrators*

Much time was spent during this study discussing the commitment of internally hired principals to their respective school districts. The principals viewed their relationship with a sense of reverence, one even referring to it as a marriage and a life-long journey. In each case the principals had a view of the organizational goals that was held with deep respect and commitment. All possessed a tremendous level of devotion to their positions, communities, and leadership. Although externally hired principals may also possess this level of commitment, the depth at which these individuals professed their commitment was nothing short of inspirational.

Knowing the deep level of commitment demonstrated by each of these individuals, it is recommended that districts develop models that encourage talented teachers to enter administration. By encouraging professional development that may

result in obtaining administrative certification, districts would be, as one principal stated, “growing their own.” Knowing the deep level of trust that these individuals have in the district, leadership can be developed and refined for the specific purpose of advancing the goals of the organization. The individuals interviewed felt that their entry into administration was supported by their district. Several of these individuals were not actively seeking administrative jobs but were instead seeking avenues by which they could advance on their respective salary schedules and have the option of future professional advancement. In the districts studied, no contract prevented advancement on the teacher’s salary schedule based on obtaining a master’s degree outside of the individual’s teaching assignment. This is a practice that needs to be continued and extended.

In each of these districts, the individuals saw immediate tangible results of obtaining a master’s degree in administration by moving horizontally on their salary schedule. One principal had received a master’s degree in education without an administrative endorsement. She admitted that this had been a mistake because having the administrative approval provided avenues outside the schedule that would be beneficial. Therefore, districts need to allow teachers to move on their respective salary schedules by obtaining master’s degrees in school administration rather than not allow them based on the fact that such a degree may not be in keeping with their present teaching assignment. By encouraging individuals to receive such degrees, each of these districts undoubtedly reaps the rewards of not only a pool of a certified pool of candidates but also increases the sense of devotion to the district by policies that provide immediate reward in terms of salary increases for advanced education.

It is recommended that districts eliminate barriers that may prevent individuals from seeking administrative positions. Professional leave for course work may be a costly endeavor in the short term due to substitute teaching costs and loss of instruction, but the long-term benefit is the acquisition of a loyal and devoted administrator who is deeply in touch with organizational mission.

#### *Transition Planning and Mission*

It was clearly established during this research that the principals were aware of the organizational mission and culture of their respective districts. Although they did undergo some growing pains regarding their actual position and relationship challenges, they recognized the fact that they were aware of the district's culture, mission, and goals. Without exception they all felt that had they been hired externally, the period of transition would have been much greater than in their current position due to the fact that they already were committed employees to the district. Therefore, the time needed by the externally hired to develop commitment and familiarity is not required. Resources devoted to supporting externally hired candidates simply do not need to be devoted to internally hired principals. Of these resources, time is perhaps the most precious. The familiarity with process and people greatly diminishes the need to devote time toward mechanisms that socialize individuals into the organizational culture, and thus the goals of the district can proceed with little interruption caused by managerial transition.

Knowing that this occurs, districts would be wise to utilize internal hiring as a viable if not preferred human resource mechanism, particularly when there is an identified need by the district to proceed with initiatives with expediency. Having individuals familiar with process and culture undoubtedly saves time and resources that



would be spent otherwise on institutional indoctrination. This allows student achievement goals to proceed with little interruption and translates into greater success for the district.

*Continued Professional Development Opportunities*

Each principal expressed deep concern regarding organizational stagnation and inbreeding due to an over reliance on internal hiring practices. Each perceived the threat that the organization could become stagnant if it relied on continually hiring internal candidates for administrative positions. Yet each principal interviewed displayed great breadth of knowledge, experience, and multiple perspectives of educational issues. In many cases it was apparent that a breadth of knowledge beyond the borders of their school district existed. This was due to the fact that each individual was acutely aware that organizational stagnation could occur and that internal hiring practices may limit the opportunity for new ideas to spring forth. A recommendation is simply that districts that employ internal promotion provide the resources necessary for principals to attend conferences and summits outside of their district. Limiting such opportunities may have a greater impact on organizational stagnation than the reliance on internal hiring.

Recognizing that internally promoted employees fear organizational stagnation, human resource officers would be wise to promote and encourage outside professional development for principals. It is recommended that this become a part of the principal's individual performance evaluation. By encouraging participation in outside professional development opportunities, the district would provide a means, through the conduit of internally hired principals, by which new ideas can be brought into the organization.

*Financial Benefits and Issues*

All the principals commented on the fact that they felt financial considerations were a part of the decision that resulted in them being elevated from the classroom to the principal's office. Regardless of whether or not there are data to substantiate this claim, the perceptions were quite real and, therefore, based on perception alone, need to be validated. Superintendents and human resource officers within a district need to be keenly aware that internally hired principals have this perception. It was discussed and inferred by the principals that this may have been an ulterior reason for the hiring decision above the competencies that they may possess. In order to alleviate this perception, districts may want to provide clear salary guidelines for all administrative staff. School districts need to move away from subjective salary and benefit guidelines for administrative staff and replace these with objective measures that will counteract any criticism regarding the hiring of administrative personnel.

*The Role of Local School Boards*

School boards must be cognizant of the hiring culture within the district and understand the impact that succession planning strategies may have on the culture of the organization. By understanding the experiences of the principals as well as the concerns addressed by the superintendents, school boards can begin to monitor how the hiring of educational leaders may affect the district. As school boards begin to develop an appreciation of the dynamics surrounding the process by which principals are hired, whether internally or externally, an oversight function can be created which may serve as a fulcrum between internal and external hiring. It is this balance that may be crucial in

combating the fears associated with institutional inbreeding that were identified by both the principals and the superintendents.

*Place-Bound Status and Relocation Costs*

Each of the principals interviewed identified various reasons that prevented him/her from relocating from the present district. Although spousal employment and extended family were recurring elements, home ownership was also a powerful factor that prevented the individuals from seeking positions elsewhere. This research may indicate that school administrators no longer possess the degree of mobility that at one time they may have had. In order to hire these individuals away from their present district there needs to be a mechanism that may serve as an enticement other than salary, benefits, and other contractual provisions. It may be prudent for schools to offer relocation packages that include the purchase of homes in order to implement external succession strategies.

By securing the services of private relocation companies, the purchase of administrator's homes may alleviate an obstacle that limits mobility. By implementing such a measure it may make it somewhat easier to hire talented, experienced administrators that may otherwise not move due to existing equity in their home or the difficulty of selling it in a timely manner that would facilitate new employment. The use of private companies to assume the risk of buying and selling real estate would alleviate the risk public entities could assume if they were to enter into such ventures. Furthermore, private relocation companies could surely take advantage of the economies of scale inherent in multiple administrative moves to make this a profitable enterprise.

Certainly, more research needs to be conducted in this area in order to determine its feasibility.

When administrators are hired, between the moment at which a contract is extended and when actual employment commences, there is little time to sell a house, purchase a new home, and get re-established. Furthermore, individual districts may not be able to afford such an arrangement, and relocation companies would not necessarily find it lucrative to contract with individual entities. By working with a state organization that has the ability to coordinate and connect a relocation company with multiple administrators who are changing districts, it may be much more profitable for relocation companies to engage in such a partnership.

#### Reflection

The completion of this study has had a profound impact on my view of individuals who were internally hired as principals. During the course of my interviews with the principals, I was impressed at the level of commitment that each felt toward his/her respective district. It is very difficult to interpret this feeling in any other manner than the words spoken by the principals themselves. One principal referred to his/her district as “home,” whereas another, as discussed earlier, compared his/her relationship with the district as a “marriage.” This deep relationship with the district had been forged through experiences in the classroom as teachers and deepened once each individual ascended to building principalships.

I walked away from each interview humbled at the reverence that each principal felt toward his/her district. I have never experienced internal promotion, and even though I have felt very close to the districts I have served, it was obvious to me that these

individuals felt a commitment toward something greater that had been nurtured as their professional lives evolved. Sensing how powerful this sentiment was among the principals, I cannot help but wonder if internal hiring should not be adopted as a norm within school districts as a succession planning strategy. If relationships and organizational commitment are central to the mission of a school district, internal candidates may be the most important standard bearers of that message.

Another epiphany that revealed itself during this study was the division that seemingly existed between the principals and central administration. Although they viewed each other somewhat favorably, a division of trust seemed to exist. This perception was stronger among the principals than the superintendents. My preconceived notions had led me to believe that the principals would view central administration as a partner. This was not necessarily the perception that I had after concluding my interviews. An air of distance prevailed and, at times, that distance was tinged with suspicion. Further research needs to be conducted regarding the relationships that exist between central administration and building level leaders in order to determine if this perception is common and, if so, how the gap can be bridged.

This research has also led me to consider the motives of externally hired administrators. The insights gathered from internal hires have intrigued me to the point that I feel externally hired principals need to reveal their stories as well. It may be important to continue examining these issues from the perspective of externally hired principals in order to conclude if any real differences are evident or if the perceptions of each group are formed as the result of fulfilling the duties of the position. Further research may well conclude that there is no significant difference between the perceptions

of internally hired principals and their counterparts. Yet based on the powerful testimonies of the principals interviewed during this particular study, I cannot help but believe that the experiences of internally hired principals are, in fact, a unique experience that results in perceptions, beliefs, and commitment that cannot be replicated by individuals who have not shared the same journey.

Yet one facet of the dynamics of internal hiring that needs further attention is that of student achievement. During the course of interviewing the principals and superintendents there was little discussion regarding whether the implementation of internal hiring as a succession planning strategy could serve as a positive mechanism toward increasing student achievement. Although the subjects may have alluded to the conditions that could affect student achievement through their reflections on transition and institutional inbreeding, it was not directly discussed. In an era of increased accountability and measurement of student achievement, it was somewhat peculiar that none of the principals focused on their experiences through the perspective of positively affecting student performance. Equally perplexing was the fact that the superintendents did not examine the dynamics of internal hiring from this vantage point. It may be prudent for further research to be conducted into whether or not internal or external hiring strategies have any significant impact on improving student performance.

### Conclusion

Although future study needs to be conducted into internal hiring as a succession planning strategy, the data provide a fascinating insight into the dynamics of internal promotion. School districts need to evaluate their individual needs regarding succession planning but may be well advised to reflect on the findings of this research in order to

implement hiring strategies that will advance the goals of the organization. If utilized as a human resource tool in a public school district the recommendations outlined need to be considered.

What certainly resulted in this study was the discovery of incredibly talented and loyal administrators who possess a great deal of commitment to the organizations they serve that seem to transcend that of the typical employee relationship. These individuals are to be commended for their time, patience, dedication, and most of all, for their stories. Their enthusiasm and loyalty are indeed an inspiration.

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